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Representations of Teenage Sexuality in American
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The Case of MTV's *16 and Pregnant* Subverting and
Reiterating American Discourse on Age and Sexuality

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1. Introduction

The aim of this thesis is to critically investigate in which ways the representations of teenage sexuality are constructed in MTV's contemporary American Reality TV show *16 and Pregnant* (2009). The increasingly explicit representation of sexuality in mainstream media (D'Emilio and Freedman 329) can be interpreted as a liberating way of opening up new paths of cultural meanings that are no longer putting a taboo status on the sexually active teen. However, rather than interpreting the high visibility of representations of teenage sexuality as suggesting a revolutionary, increasingly accepting dynamic, it is arguably crucial to be more aware of *how* teenage sexuality is represented, as is often noted when problematizing the visibility of non-heteronormative sexualities on TV (Dhaenes 305). Indeed this applies to analyzing the representation of heteronormativity, as well, as Michel Foucault's model of discourse points out how new, seemingly liberating paths of cultural expression are capable of creating new social categories of control, exerting power over them, as opposed to power constituting simple prohibition or repression (Weeks 5). Consequently, I will argue that analyzing representations of teenage sexuality in *16 and Pregnant*, will yield a deeper insight into TV's role in shaping the larger discourse on teenage sexuality. Instead of empowering, I will argue how representations of teenage sexuality are disempowering and maintaining the discursive underpinnings of age and sexuality.

The show *16 and Pregnant* has garnered an especially high degree of media as well as public attention and criticism (Conan, Dockertman, Henson, Neal, Sun), something that has only recently been receiving academic attention through Letizia Guglielmo's collection of critical essays titled *MTV and Teenage Pregnancy: Critical Essays on 16 and Pregnant and Teen Mom* in 2013. Taking on a multitude of topics and perspectives, spanning gender, media and cultural studies, the collection is the first to provide a critically engaging debate of *16 and Pregnant*, as well as its spin-offs. Moreover, it analyzes the shows' representations of gender and how they are connected to issues of class and race, binary oppositional morals, as well as *how* the shows' format claims of reality and authenticity shapes its impact on both what it means to be a teenager and teenagers perceptions of themselves. Specifically, chapters are frequently dealing with how *16 and Pregnant* reiterates and naturalizes gendered discourses of sexuality when clashing with markedly 'adult', out-of-the-teen-norm social fields of motherhood, fatherhood and pregnancy, which will be indispensable to this thesis.

While Guglielmo's colleagues see the potential of *16 and Pregnant* as a text to “offer meaningful intervention in discourse on teen sexuality and sex education” (Guglielmo ix), they also voice their suspicions of 'tired narratives' and particular wariness of the degree of authenticity and accuracy when the show's creator claims to give the viewers the “whole story of teenage pregnancy” (Guglielmo viii). What this thesis will contribute to this discussion is the detailed textual and discursive analysis of the representation of teenage sexuality in *16 and Pregnant*. In addition, I will be critically engaging the supposedly liberating discourses that are advocating for increased accessibility of sexual health services and comprehensive sexual education in recognition of teenage sexuality, which is a sentiment that can be found throughout Guglielmo's contributing essays. Instead of celebrating an increased permissiveness as the liberation of teenage sexuality, I will critically interrogate how the pedagogic discourse of comprehensive sexual education would work to maintain heteronormativity, as opposed to simply grant teenagers access to sexual health information in order empower them in recognition of their sexual agency.

Therefore, *16 and Pregnant* can be seen as a highly relevant TV text to analyze in respect to this research question, as it is not only *about* teenagers but also clearly and primarily *aimed* at a teenage audience. Due to the qualitative approach of this paper, I will be focusing on select episodes of the first season of *16 and Pregnant*. In analyzing this RTV (RTV) show, the main analytical focus will be to the ideology embedded in the show's textualities and discourse they rely on when representing teenage sexuality. This research interest favors a qualitative approach, which, I would argue, is also the thesis' main analytical strengths, as utilizing qualitative methods in this instance holds greater analytical value as opposed to quantitative methods. For instance, content analysis are a commonly used method in sociological media studies researching sexuality in the media and its supposed 'effects' upon young, impressionable minds (see Bar-On, et al., Eyal and Finnerty, Jamieson and Romer, Kim et al., Kelly, Lance, et al., Steinberg and Monahan). Content analysis, albeit having its own methodological strengths, does tend to psychologize – and by extension naturalize – sexuality, which renders it a-historical and places it outside of culture. Therefore, this perspective effectively dismisses it as a subject of inquiry it would otherwise be when looking at sexuality as a historical, localized and specific cultural category of social control.

This raises the question of how teenage sexuality is represented in this particular TV

show, which has yet to be answered in this form in media and cultural studies. Those studies that do look at the representations of sexuality on TV tend to start out with the assumption that adolescents watching are being affected by it in some way, rather than framing it as a research question to be answered (Lance, et al. 292, Bar-On, et. al. 191, Eyal and Finnerty 143, Jamieson and Romer 19). Further, studies which focus on the portrayal of teenage sexuality on TV have largely discussed either the rise of the teenage age and the role of modern mass media (Osgerby 27), or have examined the general themes and teenage characters on teen drama programs, such as *Dawson's Creek*, which is analyzed, among others, in *Teen TV as precarious*: not only in its themes and appeal, but also in an effort to mirror the “unsettled nature of adolescence” (Davis and Dickinson 4). Falling outside of the dominant methodology of content analysis when investigating teenage sexuality and TV, Janna L. Kim et. al. provides a more differentiated account of representations of sexuality on TV, specifically assessing American prime time TV shows and how their portrayal of sex and sexuality is gendered and relational. Following what they call 'heterosexual scripts', they analyze how they work to maintain dominant, heteronormative ways of feeling and acting along gender roles (Kim et. al. 145).

Adding another dimension to the precarious, unsettled state of being a teenager, Sarah Mae Baxter has probably put it best when she aimed to explore the discourse of 'teenagerness' that prevailed in North American teen dramas since the 1990s and wrote about how they are promoting the disempowerment of teens (Baxter 1). In her thesis discussing the definitive teenage dramas of the 1990s, she unearths the central dynamics in teen disempowerment, which are mainly to be found in social consequences of active sexuality – such as shaming, social ostracization, friends abandoning the sexually active teen –, the shifting attitudes of how sex should not be viewed as a risky activity but as intimate pleasure, and the normative standards of teen sex demarcated by making out and dating; however, they mainly rely on the idea that love is out of the teen's emotional control (Baxter 114). This focus on constant change and uncontrollable emotions is what is leaving the teenage-self incomplete, yet still in need of self-definition (Baxter 125). While this is her main analytical point, I will be building on this idea of 'teenagerness' as a unique and discursively 'powerless' position in society (Baxter 1) and relate it to what it might mean more specifically for the representation of teenage sexuality in *16 and Pregnant*. Within the analysis I will argue that this notion of disempowerment embedded within discourses on teenagers is what makes long-term, 'adult', heteronormative relationships 'out of

the teen norm', while simultaneously being the obvious, dominant and expected path to follow for the American teenager from the late 20th century up until today. By aspiring towards heteronormativity too early, pregnant – and by implication sexually active teenage girls – are *outside* of heteronormativity, which had previously constructed them within a virginal, asexual space and now casts them as deviant (Jackson 250). In this sense, I will argue that *active* teenage sexuality – outside of established rules of dating and reinforcement of abstinence – is counter-heteronormative, as teenagerness and what could be considered a 'complete' identity, marked by creating a sexual identity for themselves, is discursively irreconcilable. How exactly this manifests itself within the representations of teenage sexuality is going to be a main analytical focus of my analysis of *16 and Pregnant*.

Building from the existing literature which has discussed representations of teenage sexuality on TV in a qualitative manner, my analysis, too, will utilize an appropriate methodology and theoretical background stemming from TV studies, Media studies, as well as cultural studies, additionally to new, critical histories written about discourse on childhood and adolescence in the United States. Therefore, in the second chapter, I will outline the theoretical and methodological basis of my analysis, which starts at approaching TV as a realistic medium. Noting this is relevant, as this will help to differentiate TV's often controversial role – overestimated in having specific 'effects' on its passive audience –, yet will also help to further evaluate its role within larger discourse on teenage sexuality. Indeed, by looking at TV shows as texts with certain genres, my analysis will come closer to unearthing the textualities and how they work when representing teenage sexuality. When uncovering these textualities, I will be relying on Stuart Hall's work on representations, which will further differentiate the thesis' understanding of TV texts and in which terms they are able to construct the *impression* of reality, rather than reflect it. Here, Christine Gledhill's analysis of soap opera as a gendered genre will especially prove helpful, as she extends the literary category of 'realism' with the more clearly defined analytical categories of generic- and cultural verisimilitude (Gledhill 360). Making this distinction will further enable my analysis to trace the textually 'realistic' ways of *16 and Pregnant's* representations of teenage sexuality, rather than conflate RTV's generic verisimilitude with an 'authentic' reflection of the current discourse on teenage pregnancy in the United States.

The following section will be discussing the structuralizing concept of genre – and

specifically RTV –, as well as further explore how the impression of realism can be constructed in TV textualities and aesthetics. Moreover, outlining *how* these textualities function will be discussed when considering the structural devices of realism, namely myth and metonymy. In connection to realist texts, myth and metonymy have been shown to work to smooth out ambiguities and inconsistencies, which will eventually lead to a unified, harmonious text without contradictions (Fiske 26). On a structurally larger level, this corresponds with the concepts of ideology, hegemony and discourse, as well as how these concepts have been applied when studying TV as text, which will be discussed in the subsequent sections.

Additionally to clarifying terminology when analyzing *16 and Pregnant*'s textualities and representations, I will explore past and current discourse on American conceptions of sexuality, as well as childhood and adolescent sexuality. Guided by sociohistorical accounts of sexuality, I will attempt to trace its changes as a category of social control. While the discursive challenge of the naturalization of gender and sexuality have become more common, I will argue that age as a social category has stubbornly remained naturalized, specifically in its discursive multiaxiality (Fiske, *Media* 66) with sexuality. Indeed, the conceptual dichotomy of childhood and adulthood – not to mention the later introduction of the categories of the 'adolescent' and the 'teenager' –, as well as their operationalization as a category of social control is a recent phenomenon embedded within socioeconomic, as well as medical, psychological and pedagogical discursive formations (Jackson 232). Therefore, when talking about sexuality, and teenage sexuality, my analysis is interested not in specific sexual acts or social practices, but rather seeks to explore those discourses which *16 and Pregnant* appears to rely on not just in its textuality, but also within the interactions and relational dynamics of teenagers, their parents, and the teenage audience. In order to provide contextualization, I will provide a brief outline of the current academic and national discussion of teenage pregnancy in the United States, not just because *16 and Pregnant* has not created teenage pregnancy as a 'problem'. Indeed, contextualizing *16 and Pregnant* within preceding debates about curbing teenage pregnancy through introducing comprehensive sexual education in place of abstinence education will further help analyze the show's representations of teenage sexuality and pregnancy.

The first half of the third chapter will provide the textual analysis of *16 and Pregnant* as an RTV text. Here, specifically RTV's genre conventions and its textualities, such as camera shots, angles and their point-of-view (POV), voice-over narration, music, and editing will be of

immense relevance when exploring how, in TV terms, representations of teenage sexuality are constructed and delimited. As I will argue, as the teenage girls themselves are acting as narrators, additionally to the show exclusively presenting their POV, represents teenage pregnancy as a heavily gendered, aged and individualized 'problem'. This is connected to *16 and Pregnant's* contrastive editing which, together with its compressed timespan of covering approximately six months per episode, works to represent teenage pregnancy in terms of personal and private struggles, failures, disappointed hopes and conflicts with parents and partners. Structuring scenes of brief glimpses of hope – such as prom night or the moment of birth – with the show's high frequency of conflict scenes is what I will argue is distinctive to *16 and Pregnant's* representation of teenage pregnancy. Such emotional juxtapositioned editing does not solely provide a stark contrast, but rather, it is one of the textual ways in which the struggle with the heteronormative consequences of sexuality is individualized, as well as aged and gendered. That this is accompanied by the teenaged narration will become of immense importance, as it imbues the struggle of teenage pregnancy with the impression of autobiographical authenticity and 'emotion as truth' (Fiske 219, Skeggs and Wood 27) as well as demarcates a shift of discursive power over teenage sexuality from parental to teenaged authority. Even though these textualities appear to have the potential of empowering teenaged voices, I will argue that they rather accomplish the opposite: exactly *through* representing teenage sexuality as a deeply personal, almost autobiographical narrative, its compressed timespan and frequent depiction of fights and struggles delimit teenage sexuality to its heteronormative consequences, permeating it with a deep level of anxiety, fear and uncertainty. This marks the dislocation of what has been increasingly deemed a 'social and public problem' (Furstenberg 122) into deeply individualized realms, which has many conflicting consequences for teenage sexuality as an area of potential identity formation.

Indeed, the textually most interesting and compelling feature is *16 and Pregnant's* POV which is overwhelmingly that of the teenage girl, which is not just emphasized by the subject matter, but by the show's camera angles as well as narration. Together with narration and contrastive editing, the show's POV works textually to naturalize teenage pregnancy as individualized problem, a mistake caused by teenage irresponsibility. Even though there seems to be ethnographic potential in these texts, they purport a highly gendered burden of contraception and pregnancy, as well as child-care, relying individualization and the

governmentality of sexuality (Skeggs and Wood 4). Teenage pregnancy in itself constitutes a failure in the self-regulation of sexuality, as well as the counter-hegemonic attempt at creating a sexual identity when the teen is not *meant* to be sexual. By representing teenage pregnancy as a biographical, self-narrated, *reality* program further solidifies the notion that teenage pregnancy cannot be possibly caused by anything else but a poor choice, complete with consequences which must be struggled with. This is further obscuring how teenage pregnancy might be embedded within bigger structural forces, such as poverty and poor economic prospects (Gee), especially when considering that ever since the conception of 'the teenager' as a social category, children and adolescents have been continuously seen “as a huge consumer market.” (O'Brien and Szeman 66). Consequently, these representations of teenage sexuality shift the focus onto the further self-regulation of sexuality and promoting abstinence, especially by lack of discussing contraceptives and abortion (Lance et al. 292). Perhaps paradoxically, in giving teenage girls a voice, it *silences* these potential voices when they themselves voice the dominant discourses that promote and maintain the disempowerment of teenagers, as well as the gendered burden of teenage pregnancy.

Stepping beyond analysing TV textualities, the second half of the third chapter will explore the discourse *16 and Pregnant's* textualities are interdependent with. Here, the analytical categories are relational dynamics, with the two most prominent ones being established between parents and their pregnant teenage daughters, as well as the pregnant teenage girl as a narrator in relation to her audience. Exploring the language along the lines of relational dynamics makes analytical sense, as discourse is relational in its conception of power and knowledge. Therefore, I will arrive at a more differentiated analysis of the discourses on teenage sexuality in *16 and Pregnant* when situating them within their relations of social production. As I will show in more detail, the overwhelming majority of interaction taking place between parents and their teenage daughters is conflicting in tone. This makes it a primary terrain of struggle (Fiske, *Media* 4) over the discourse on teenage sexuality, which is always a matter of contest and negotiation. In greater detail, I will elaborate on how representing teenage sexuality in connection to scenes of parental-adolescent conflict, as well as discuss infantilization and naturalization of age, will tie back to the previously analyzed TV textualities.

The second relational dynamic analyzed will be that of the teenage narrator and her

teenage audience. This relational dynamic is relevant to this analysis not just because of the teenage girl's dual role – as an expert on her own failure of staying within the discursive boundaries of her adolescence, as well as a teenager – but rather because this relational dynamic marks a shift in the traditionally adult control and teenage sexuality (Jackson 231). As such, this dynamic is where emergent discourses on teenage sexuality could be created through teenage voices. Instead, I will argue how this potential for subverting current and dominant discourse on sexuality reinforce it as an *adult* space, which is a hegemonic reality accepted and reiterated by the teenage narrators of *16 and Pregnant*. That the struggles and failures, as well as subsequent fears and anxieties they face, are indeed inherent to their age and their attempt at transgressing into the *adult*, heteronormative realms of sexuality and parenthood is at the core of *16 and Pregnant*'s representation of teenage sexuality. In concert with the formulaic structure and generic verisimilitude, the show is giving its audience an authentic, emotionally *real* impression of the consequences of teenage sexuality through a variety of starkly different teenage voices. As a result of interdependent textualities and discourses, *16 and Pregnant* creates the moral panic of '*it-could-happen-to-you*' (Thomas 119-120), which extends these anxieties onto the audience who is encouraged to engage with this TV text from the pregnant teenage girl's subject position.

The last section of this analysis chapter will be putting these representations into context. *16 and Pregnant*'s anxiety-inducing representations of teenage pregnancy have helped to render teenage pregnancy to metonymically stand for teenage sexuality as a whole. In connection to this stands the sociocultural shift in attitudes towards sexual permissiveness, aided by the continuous economic equality of women, which made teenage pregnancy the big social problem in the middle of the 1990s when it became socially unacceptable to stigmatize unwed or single mothers (Furstenberg 1). At the same time, this provided incentives to further consolidate the social stigma of the teenager mother who is seemingly forgoing the 'progress' of gender equality within the workforce, as well as the predominant expectation of the labor market to pursue some form of higher education. In fact, the U. S. discussion of the 'problem' of teenage pregnancy rarely ever falls outside of an economic perspective, never failing to mention costs in form of social support networks, such as welfare programs, claiming that solving teenage pregnancy could also solve intergenerational poverty, which is supposedly caused due to missed educational opportunities (Bonell 255). If AIDS reintroduced death to sex

in the mid-1980s (Brooks-Gunn and Furstenberg 67), then teenage pregnancy appears to have reintroduced poverty to sex in the latter part of the 20th century.

Contrastingly, it needs to be pointed out that, alongside other criticism of failing to provide basic information on sexual health that would indeed help teenagers avoid unplanned pregnancy (Lance et al. 292), *16 and Pregnant*'s potential power to reframe the debate on teenage sexuality on a national level is not as improbable as it might appear on first glance. The show's creator worked together with *The National Campaign To Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy* (*The National Campaign* from here onward) to create this 'public service announcement', and claiming there is need for a national discussion of teenage pregnancy, as well as a need to give pregnant teenage girls a voice in this debate (Dolgen). At the same time, a survey conducted by *The National Campaign* published in 2013 reports that, while the national rate of teenage pregnancy has declined drastically – 42% since 1990 –, the majority of American citizens surveyed believe that the rate has increased dramatically. It is my contention that this disconnect between the perception and the 'reality' of teenage pregnancy might exist exactly *because* of highly visible campaigns and national efforts to prevent it. However, it is worth acknowledging that, while *The National Campaign* has called this survey 'The Greatest Story Never Told', it is indeed involved in telling the story of teenage pregnancy by being involved in such programs such as *16 and Pregnant* (MTV), *The Secret Life of the American Teenager* (ABC Family), *Family Guy* (FOX), *How I Met Your Mother* (CBS), *Raising Hope* (FOX), and *Gossip Girl* (The CW), among others (Tally 210). As such, not only *16 and Pregnant*, but numerous other shows about and aimed at teens – only a few of them named above – are worthy of academic interrogation when it comes to the ways in which teenage sexuality is represented in them.

2. Theory and Methodological Background

2.1. Understanding TV: approaching a realistic medium

From the very start, TV has been conceptualized as a 'window into the real world', or a sort of mirror reflecting and capturing reality (Bignell 21). This credibility has been bestowed upon TV mostly because of the technology that seemed to produce immediacy. It indeed seemed to have

the ability of relating the viewer “to the world around him or her”, while, at the same time, “[TV] separates the viewer from his or her experience of reality” (Bignell 23). This view of TV implicates an 'immediate' impact onto the viewer which is usually 'negative' in the sense that audiences are seen as manipulated by whatever 'effect' or 'message' TV might wish to impose. While this is an abandoned, analytically narrow and unhelpful perspective in today's TV studies, the *perceived* impact of TV programs on cultural values and even individual behavior should not be dismissed. The still existent belief that TV is, in fact, a powerful medium is especially relevant when addressing media representations of teenage sexuality, as the idea of the 'hypodermic needle' model still possesses an instinctive appeal in popular culture, especially in arguments that are attempting to blame the media for societal problems, such as teenagers engaging in sexuality earlier and teenage pregnancy (Danesi 148, Kelly 480). The problem with this perspective, however, is that it would lead us to view representations of teenage sexuality as *manipulative* or having certain *effects*, instead of treating these representations as part of cultural production and social construction of meanings (Bignell 24, Fiske 45). As Danesi contends, current media studies see TV and other media as “socializing, rather than disruptive, agents” (149).

Then, when wanting to investigate a TV show's role in the social construction of meanings, *16 and Pregnant* must be understood as a TV text, which in turn has certain ways of structuring itself within the 'realistic' medium of TV. This draws attention away from presupposed 'effects' to paying greater attention to TV's format and genre specific ways of representing teenage sexuality. As John Fiske maintains, it is TV's technologically immediate and transparent appearance helped naturalize its representations by obscuring all the stages of production that were necessary to make them seem natural and 'realistic' in the first place, an observation that should remind us not to assume an unbiased transparency, but it should rather steer us to analyze the ways TV “produces 'reality' rather than reflects it” (21). Therefore, whenever TV is described as 'realistic', it is “because it reproduces the dominant sense of reality” and serves up its audiences a “socially convincing sense of the real” that relies heavily on “the discursive conventions by which and for which a sense of reality is constructed” (ibid.). Taking a look at these discursive conventions when it comes to representing teenage sexuality in *16 and Pregnant* will be the central focus of this thesis.

In the course of answering my main research question, my main focus shall be on

examining “how dominant ideology is structured into popular texts by the discourses and conventions” (Fiske 14), pointing out the continuous discursive struggles over the dominant meanings of contemporary, American representations of teenage sexuality which, not unlike race and gender, are not stable categories, but rather “terrains of struggle” (Fiske, *Media* 66). Unearthing the discourses that shape the representation of teenage sexuality requires balanced methodology made up of a textual approach, using text analysis and semiotics as applied in TV and media studies, as well as a cultural studies approach, that involves discourse analysis, as well as concepts such as power, knowledge, ideology and identity (Bignell 228). The reasons for not using *either* semiotic analysis *or* discourse analysis are manifold. Firstly, methodological mixtures allow the analysis of representations of teenage sexuality not just as matters of text, but also connecting the text's to its larger, surrounding discourses when evaluating *16 and Pregnant's* role in the stream of dominant and emergent discourses of American, teenage sexuality.

Secondly, while still attempting to maintain analytical focus, it ensures that I do not lend the aforementioned and supposed 'effect' of media texts too much weight, without dismissing its role as 'trivial' within the representational systems of culture. Media, after all, is simultaneously drawing from already existing discourses as well as contributing and shaping certain discourses. When talking about TV programs as *texts* using certain discourses and representations, I am taking the more recent TV studies perspective that sees TV programs as having 'potentials of meaning' rather than simply being 'cultural commodities' (Fiske 14), or fixed *things* that have a certain 'message' or 'effect'. Through this perspective, the text's audience is awarded great power to make the text mean many different things and reiterates that creating meaning is not solely produced by texts. Therefore, TV texts comprise a prime “site of conflict between their forces of production and modes of reception” (Fiske 14), with the former being of prime interest in this thesis' analysis.

2.1.1. Representations

If TV should not be understood as a reflective, mimetic medium holding up a supposedly 'faithful' and 'authentic' mirror to society, it then follows that TV texts are better understood to be *representing* certain groups of people, events and sociocultural practices. According to Hall (1), systems of representations play a central part when culture creates, circulates and shares meaning, which makes it, very basically, a central cultural practice that comes to bear when

making sense of the world around us. When looking at TV texts through a cultural studies perspective, especially when investigating their use of discourses, that culture is less a fixed array of material 'things' and more a process of cultural practices which circulate meanings among society (Hall 2), and *16 and Pregnant* should be considered a part of this process. This emphasis on cultural processes and practices, the observation that meaning is *constructed* and never *intrinsic*, is of utmost importance (Hall 3) as it opens up potential fields of research, analyzing the dynamics, paradoxes and overlaps of discourses and in which ways they are imbuing certain groups or discourses with power. How meaning is constructed leads to the question of *how* meanings is represented: investigating which genre conventions, which audio-visual composition, or which kind of relational dynamics and dialogues are at work when representing teenage sexuality is at the center of my analysis. All these ways of representation are worthy of interrogation, as representations never innocently *happen*, but were actively constructed, drawing on certain discourse over others.

Accordingly, everything that is involved in the representational system of TV – images, sounds, music, genre conventions etc. – is important to investigate, and simply to account for their existence or note their absence; what all these elements actually *do* when used to represent teenage sexuality is what my thesis is mainly interested in exploring. In this sense, we must look at TV similarly to language, namely, as Hall puts it, a “signifying practice” (Hall 5) which has their own ways of referring to cultural values, meanings and ideas.

Further, these systems of representations follow certain conventions which shapes the stories they tell, whether it be in films or any other form of entertainment, as well as in our everyday conversations which are making sense of the world around us and our place in it (O'Brien and Szeman 60). Therefore, especially when talking about TV texts and their representations of teenage sexuality, 'making sense' reaches beyond textualities and their functions, with even TV texts and its 'language' of audio-visual codes constituting just as much shared knowledge as the shared, cultural assumptions the TV texts are drawing from (ibid.). More importantly, the fact that representations are an integral part of those forces that “create the world we live in, shape our beliefs and behaviors, our fears and desires” (O'Brien and Szeman 83). Although this statement might appear vague at best, it will aid us in understanding *16 and Pregnant's* intertwined textuality and discourses and the kind of representations they are constructing, as it too is a text invested in shaping dominant discourses of teenage sexuality.

For now, it is relevant to point out that, although I cannot focus on each possible step of meaning-making process within the analysis, TV texts are not the beginning and end of the cultural process of meaning-making. Rather, I will focus on those ways which are directly encoded into the textual representation of teenage sexuality, namely, the ways in which they “construct a visual text, using signs and narrative forms supplied by the surrounding culture and their own position within that culture” (O'Brien and Szeman 89). To 'decode' these ways, I will offer what Hall would call a dominant or hegemonic reading position which focuses on the TV textualities which are delimiting potential meanings within *16 and Pregnant* (O'Brien and Szeman 90). This means that the text's representations, and the way they are encoded and on which discourses they are drawing from, still puts limitations on how a certain text can be read, as even a counter-hegemonic reading would imply the understanding, as well as acceptance of the dominant code in rejecting it and decoding it from another perspective (O'Brien and Szeman 90). What those perspectives, or ideologies, might be and how they work together with representations and discourses will be discussed later on.

One such encoded limitation upon the text is present in the structural forms of TV programs and how they organize into certain genres. Genre conventions and their rules, and how they intersect with representations of teenage sexuality in *16 and Pregnant*, will be discussed in the following passages.

2.1.2. TV Genres

TV programs create their meanings by similarity and difference to other programs (Bignell 222). This is common to all texts – as Chandler puts it, “no text is an island” (199) –, as they organize themselves around “conventionalized but dynamic structures” (ibid). However, Miller goes so far to say that genre is 'central' to TV as a medium and text, and that a “genre-based study is crucial to understanding content, given the serial, repetitious nature of much television [...]” (82). It follows, then, that genre conventions are made up of what I have already discussed as systems of representation, which in TV's case would be putting the themes, narrative structure, camera angles, music, sounds and cast into a specific relation (Miller 83).

Apart from considering already established genre conventions, my analysis will further consider “the speaker or writer of the text, the audience of the text and their relationship with each other” as well as what Paltridge calls “the goal, or purpose, of the texts” (98), which is not

necessarily a question that can be answered easily nor definitively. For instance, questions of authorship, or simply asking *who speaks* for whom in RTV programs such as *16 and Pregnant* becomes a complex, analytical category that quickly connect to a 'purpose' or 'goal' and question the intended authenticity such a text claims for itself.

Additionally, Paltridge writes about the importance of embedding a genre within its sociocultural context, which I will investigate by considering its main perspective, its intended target audience as well as 'their role and purpose in reading the text', culturally shared discourse, by both the text and its audience (98-99). This culturally shared knowledge, together with dominant discourses of making-sense structure the way we tell stories and structure them not into simply *genres*, but *gendered genres* (Fiske 221). It follows that a significant part of how genre texts are making themselves familiar and recognizable to their audience is how these text address their audience, something that will come up frequently in my analysis, because it holds a significant weight in both ideology and hegemony. However, before analyzing *16 and Pregnant*, I will now take a closer look at realism in TV texts in general.

2.1.3. Realism and TV texts

Even though *realism* is an arguably ambiguous term in TV studies – one I will attempt to differentiate within my analysis of the RTV genre –, I will specifically focus on TV and its reliance on familiar codes and specific genre conventions that have become to represent reality on TV (Bignell 204). This is how the fictional story world of a TV text is drawing on familiar, recognizable and culturally shared knowledge (ibid.). Furthermore, TV realism relies on the notion of 'normality' and how it is associated with a common code of judgment of what is outside and within normality, which invites the audience to identify with or judge characters (Bignell 216). Most importantly, TV realism “places the viewer in the position of a unified subject 'interpellated' with, or folded into, the discourses of dominant ideology” (Bignell 218), which is a function that will greatly weigh into the TV texts and their genre's which I will discuss in more depth later on in this paper.

Less concerning TV texts' structural form, television realism has been said to take place in a contemporary setting where the action is distinctively ordinary and human, and not those of societal leaders or prominent figures (Fiske 22). What sets American television realism apart from literary *social realism*, however, is that it mainly concerns the middle class (Fiske 23). Still, all these characteristics let us easily observe how TV indeed offers itself as a privileged

medium for realism, which is evidenced in the structural features of the medium's texts: its relatively small screen is better equipped to show us faces rather than large expanses of landscapes, which leads TV texts to utilize close ups (CU), mid-shots (MS) and extreme close-ups (ECU), as well as indoor, domestic settings that are easier to capture (Fiske 22), and most commonly shared among the audience. Additionally, as Fiske writes, critics have put 'nowness' at the center of TV's defining character, majorly for its 'live' broadcasts (22). This quality is deeply embedded in TV's very technology and the way programs are produced creates an “absence of authorial (or editorial) intervention [which] adds subtly to the sense of realisticness, the sense that the camera is merely recording what happened, and to the sense of liveness, that it is happening now” (Fiske 22-23).

And yet, TV realism cannot be reduced to its materiality and technology, as these aspects do find themselves in its textualities as well. In order to get a better understanding of this, semiotics has become an approach firmly established in cultural studies to textual analysis, and at a very basic levels “seeks to analyze texts as structured wholes and investigates latent, connotative meanings” (Chandler 8). It goes hand in hand with the rejection of quantitative approaches, such as content analyses and the assumption that frequency of a certain 'content' can give us more insight about meaning or significance of that phenomenon (ibid). Semiotics, consequently, is looking at structural aspects and their relation to one another, focusing “on the system of rules governing the 'discourse' involved in media texts, stressing the role of semiotic context in shaping meaning” (Chandler 9). This analytical focus of semiotics is one of the reasons why it is methodologically compatible with the concept of discourse, where power and knowledge are conceptualized not as static, fixed entities, but rather thought of as dynamic, relational processes in constant tension over a struggle for meaning.

It follows, then, that when applying these approaches to text analysis, my thesis will be able to reveal

the ways the discourses and texts position readers to *embody* ideology. In this process of embodiment, people resolve contradictions and accommodate values which do not necessarily equate with their own day-to-day life. The values become built into their own understandings of their own desires, identities and expectations of future situations. (Thwaites 175).

Therefore, textual analysis helps us explain *how* certain structures in texts makes them realistic,

namely, how the functions of narrative create a realistic text. The classical order of *equilibrium – disruption – equilibrium* comprises most realist narratives, although this is, at the same time, what sets them apart from the 'real world': we cannot observe events or experiences in the world that we experience as having a beginning, middle and end (Chandler 90). The linear progression of these events enhances the impression of narrative realism, as it provides the audience with a predictable and coherent outcome (ibid.). Interestingly, this predictability made possible by the narrative structure enables the realist text to 'make the strange familiar', as well as representing events so that they appear to be 'unproblematic' and 'natural' (Chandler 91).

As a result, familiar structures are able to naturalize unfamiliar content: the structural closure of a realist narrative implies strengthening the preferred reading of that narrative, which overlaps with the form of realism eventually defusing even radical content within its familiar structure (Fiske 38). Most importantly, the coherence of the narrative enforces a coherent subject, which means that realist narrative structure established a sense of continuity where there is none (Chandler 91). This is of utmost analytical relevance, if only to remind us that even narrative structure in itself is never 'neutral'; it always suggests certain choices that have been made that give a certain and distinct representational preference over another, which necessarily entails certain ideological and political implications (ibid.). Semiotics, therefore, in combination with discourse analysis, is an invaluable tool at linking certain structural forms to certain ways of knowing, and how both work to legitimize and privilege each other when representing teenage sexuality in *16 and Pregnant*.

2.1.4. Myth and Metonymy

Another vital textual device in creating the impression of realism is that of metonymy. On a basic level, metonymy as a device that enables a part of reality to stand for the larger group it represents (Bignell 222). It is “an association of terms. One sign is associated with another of which it signifies a part, the whole, one of its functions or attributes, or a real related concept” (Thwaites 52). As metonymy works through association rather than substitution, the connections they create can be very subtle and therefore powerful because of their obviousness (Thwaites 53) which is at work at various levels – ideologically and discursively – when talking about certain cultural concepts being naturalized.

Further, the concept of myth comes into play when looking at the larger level of structural composition for naturalizing cultural concepts. A myth is not “something *represented*

in a text, but a way texts have of *structuring* their representations” (Thwaites 69). At the center of mythical structuring is that it “erases historical conditions of inequality in which actual human beings live” (O'Brien and Szeman 63) by its textual usage of simplistic and superficial signs that seem to fall into place, harmoniously and naturally by presenting a seemingly coherent, simple text (ibid.). Additionally, the characteristic of a mythical structure is the way in which denotative meanings are ordered in a metonymical fashion, namely very often in a binary opposition which is resulting in an oversimplification of relationships (Thwaites 65-67), an observation that will become indispensable to my analysis.

Indeed, together with Halls discussion on representations, it is notable how “no text is simply a pattern of signifiers: a text is a bearer of meanings,[...] they identify and limit the arena within which the meanings may be found” (Fiske 84). Therefore, I shall not gloss over *16 and Pregnant*'s textual polysemy when it does occur (Fiske 87-89), however, at the same time I will argue that the text greatly delimits its potential meanings rather than opens it up to multiple readings. A perhaps unexpected oppositional reading of *16 and Pregnant* is provided in its criticism of 'glamorizing teenage pregnancy' (Henson), although, as I will show in my analysis, even this reading still recognizes the text's preferred reading.

As I have argued, even though textual analysis is a powerful tool to uncover the ideology of formal structures, I need to take a step further if I want to avoid structural reduction (Chandler 92). Specifically because these ideological dynamics do not remain merely structural is the reason why I will look to concepts of discourse, as well as ideology, to help uncover the multifaceted ways how *16 and Pregnant* as an RTV text constructs its representations of teenage sexuality. While Louis Althusser's discussion of ideology, as well as Fiske's work on semiotics within TV studies will help analyze the ways in which *16 and Pregnant* addresses and *encourage* the audience to assume a certain subject position, I will look to discourse analysis, as well as a brief historical survey of how American adolescent sexuality has been shaped by various dominant and competing discourses, in order to more thoroughly answer my research question.

2.2. Ideology, Discourse and Hegemony

On a basic level, ideology is a 'logic of ideas' (Thwaites 158), a specific and consistent way of making sense of the world, often shared and held amongst members of a social group. Being

relational in their conception, ideologies are “processes of representing material social relations, and of attempting to reconcile them in discourse” (Thwaites 159). This reconciliation is of utmost importance, since ideology, as well as the later discussed concepts of hegemony and discourse, work to 'smooth over' differences, whether they be material or social, and avoid conflict by naturalizing them (ibid.). For instance, the gender binary is one of the most prominent ways of creating difference in ideology, as even today, with legal protection and heightened social awareness against gender discrimination, society remains largely ordered in patriarchal ideology (Thwaites 160). Comparatively, the social category of age – specifically the division of childhood, adolescence and adulthood – is a binary structure that also orders society, one of the most naturalized among social categories which constitutes an “axis of power” (Fiske 66). Moreover, when analyzing a text's ideology, I seek to not only point out its structural working of creating naturalness, but also want to reveal “the *constructedness* of the social context in which readers and texts interact, and in doing that suggests the possibilities of changing them”(Thwaites 175).

Althusser formulated in his central thesis that “ideology is a 'representation' of the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence” (Rivkin 693). In this sense, when talking about teenage sexuality, I am not referring to the *actual*, practiced sex-acts or the way teens construct their own sexual identity and gender roles, although this would also present a worthwhile research undertaking. Rather, I am interested in exploring “the imaginary relation of those individuals to the real relations in which they live” (Rivkin 695). Even though ideology consists mainly of the imagined relations between individuals to their relations of production, Althusser states that “ideology has a material existence” (Rivkin 695). This materiality of ideology is due to the fact that all 'subjects' are bound to put their beliefs, their certain ideological relationship to material existence into *action*, which is then put into 'material practice' which is then regulated by 'rituals' (Rivkin 696).

This process of naturalizing material and social inequalities, especially by dealing with contradictions, is something I have already talked about in my analysis on representations, as well as realism in TV. These structural and ideological considerations will come to bear when I will analyze the representations of teenage sexuality, specifically when considering which ideological assumptions are at work when constructing the discourse of teenage pregnancy as a social problem, and how they are legitimized.

According to Thwaites, ideology in its most powerful form is hegemony (168), as dynamics of power in contemporary, Western cultures are conceived as power relations between groups and institutions, which “tend to emerge through processes of consent rather than coercion or force”, which means that within hegemony, “ideology is not imposed on individuals, but *offered* them” (Thwaites 169). Indeed, the subtlety and obviousness in this dynamic is that those ideologies on offer seem so commonsensical, so obvious that the hegemonic then constitutes something “you *already* agree with, as a reflection of your own desires and wants, in which you can already and effortlessly recognize yourself” (Thwaites 169), even though the ideology on offer might not necessarily be in *your* best interest, but rather, in that of a dominant social group (Thwaites 170). Interpellation coupled with the common-sense obviousness is strong in hegemony when

it says, *We all want the same way of life, we all feel about things in much the same way, don't we?* The flawlessly-complexioned model in the cosmetics ad, the happiness of retirees who wisely invested in a superannuation fund, the four-wheel-drive on the cliff-top, all say *How could you not want this?* To resist hegemony can seem like resisting one's own desires. This is how it is so resilient. (Thwaites 170)

It follows, then, that within hegemonic ideology, “the values and interests of the hegemonic group are experienced by others as already their own, and thus already consented to” (Thwaites 169), and additionally, “ideology is itself the product of institutional discourses which are precisely to serve the interest of a particular group. In claiming to be universal, what ideology is actually doing is *universalising* the discourses of that group” (171-172). In the case of teenage sexuality, this also applies when observing that adolescents are in a social position where they are expected to accept and carry on those dominant, naturalized values and interests, preserving them for the future hegemonic group they themselves will become. After all, the concept of ideology will be shown as helpful when considering categories of social formation – such as gender, sexuality and age – and why they have resisted the “challenge [of] so-called 'natural patterns of identification and desire'” (O'Brien and Szeman 175).

Discourses, in turn, are *ways of knowing*, which are made up of certain ways of constructing and talking about this knowledge, concerning any topic or cultural practice (Hall 6). Discourses are also thought of in clusters or formations “of ideas, images, practices, which provide ways of talking about, forms of knowledge and conduct associated with, a particular

topic, social activity or institutional site in society” (ibid.). These ways of knowing are powerful in the way that they define what is appropriate or inappropriate to say in a certain social situation, practice, or connected to a certain subjectivity, and therefore also map out *who* is able to talk or write with official, legitimized authority about particular subjects (O'Brien and Szeman 63). Connected to this is the fact that discourses are constructive and constitutive in that they define *what* “knowledge is considered useful, relevant and 'true' in what context; and what sorts of persons or 'subjects' embody its characteristics” (ibid.). In this decentralized, relational dynamic of power, knowledge is a key, reciprocal component. According to Foucault's work on the concept of discourse, knowledge is made up of those relations of power that determine what should be valued as 'true', how disparate ways of knowing should be valued, and most importantly, what “material effects” those kinds of knowledges will have (ibid.). Put succinctly, 'knowledge is power', because “it comes into being through the operation of power and it *exercises* power by making things happen” (ibid.).

In recent history, the natural sciences, medicine, as well as law, have all been discursive formations that were constituted in relation to a specific time in history, as well as institutions that took ways of knowing and enacted them into 'managing subjects' (O'Brien and Szeman 63). This was achieved through psychological or medical treatment, among other ways, which constituted the legitimization of “forms of social control over particular groups in society – those deemed unwell, unfit, socially maladjusted, criminal [...] its incorporation of forms of *representation* with forms of social *practice*, which work in reciprocal relation with one another” (ibid.). Additionally, the structural, semiotic basis for discourse lies in what Thwaites calls the “truth-effect” of denotation (63), which further strengthens my analytical perspective when wanting to analyze representations of teenage sexuality in TV texts, as special attention needs to be paid to how these struggles are negotiated. Not so that I can identify a 'dominant' consensus of what teenage sexuality can mean, rather, to identify the ways in which this dominant and other possible meanings are legitimized, which discursive formation they draw on in order to lend validity to the representations of what teenage sexuality means (Thwaites 64). This will further help us evaluate what extend of discursive power that can be ascribed to *16 and Pregnant's* representations of teenage sexuality without dismissing it as trivial pop culture nor imbuing it with manipulative powers.

2.2.1. Discourse and Ideology in TV Texts

As I have established, when looking to explore how meanings are produced in TV texts, I not only need to look to the textualities, as well as the formal aspects of discourse, but also include those ideological assumptions they rely on (Fiske 14). Therefore,

discourse is a language or system of representation that has developed socially in order to make and circulate a coherent set of meanings about an important topic area. These meanings serve the interests of that section of society within which the discourse originates and which works ideologically to naturalize those meanings into common sense. (ibid.)

When applying discourse analysis to a TV text the way Fiske proposes, then that I “can identify the discourses out of which it is structured, [... not] the discourses the viewer will bring to bear upon it to make it into a text that bears meanings for him or her” (Fiske 15), which, at the same time will determine the methodological scope of my analysis.

Thus, I am looking to analyze the primary textual as well as larger discursive ways in which *16 and Pregnant* attempts “to control and define its potential meanings: the discourse of the reader may resist this control” (ibid.). This ensures that I take the TV text's identifiable limitations on the discourse of sexuality seriously – focusing on the fact that the TV text is interactive, yet delimits its possible readings –, while at the same time leaving room for further analysis when it comes to its 'effectivity' (Fiske 19). As Fiske maintains, “television does not 'cause' identifiable effects in individuals; it does, however, ideologically promote and prefer certain meanings of the world, to circulate some meanings rather than others, and to serve some social interests better than others”, which is a phenomenon he calls 'ideological work' (Fiske 20). How successful a TV text is in its effectivity – as opposed to having a measurable, causal and behavioral 'effect' –, is a question textual and ideological discourse analysis is equipped to answer (ibid.). More importantly, I have to note how discourses help “make a particular pattern of sense of gender in the family, in the workplace, in school, in social clubs – in fact, in our general social relations” (Fiske 15), both within and outside of a TV text.

Finally, discourse is a helpful concept when talking about TV texts and their representations because they are not simply *reflective* of a social and ideological system, but rather, are “inextricably [to] a set of social relations [which] obviously requires meanings and frameworks which underpin them and hold them in place” (Hall (1984) qtd. in Fiske 52). This

allows my analysis to account for the rather subtle complexity when it reveals “the wide variety of codes all cohere to present a unified set of meanings that work to maintain, legitimate, and naturalize the dominant ideology of patriarchal capitalism. Their ideological effectivity appears irresistible” (Rivkin 1282). This dynamic will bear increased relevance when I will look at which discourses are utilized when arguing the prevention of teen pregnancy in relation to economic and educational set backs. These arguments, upon first glance, seem indeed irrefutable and irresistible, as rejecting them would essentially mean to be against education as a path to obtaining high paid employment, which is the current normative, middle class ideology.

2.3. Understanding Sexuality: American Discourse on Childhood and Adolescence

When talking about the modern conception of sexuality, it must be understood that “over the past few centuries sexuality has assumed major symbolic importance as a target of social intervention and organisation, to a degree that differentiates this period from those preceding it” (Weeks 11). As a matter of fact, the Victorian age fostered sexuality as a morally defining social category which, at the same time, became to be “a factor in health, energy, activity; its frustrations is a cause of ill health, social unorthodoxy, even madness” (Weeks 12). According to Foucault, since the Victorian age,

both the importance we assign to [... sexuality and sexual identity] and the theoretical unification it implies – is an historical construct of the past few hundred years. The fundamental question [...] is how is that in our society sex is not seen just as a means of biological reproduction nor a source of harmless pleasure, but, on the contrary, has come to be seen as the central part of our being, the privileged site in which the truth of ourselves is to be found? (Weeks 6)

In this process of imbuing sexuality with more and more privilege and defining power, modern, Western conceptions of sexuality were shaped by two very specific notions: Firstly, the fact that it is understood as a “supreme private experience”, an intimate experience of self-expression taking place between two people rather than being centered around fertility and adolescent rites-of-passage, and secondly, the fact that sex is not simply a “series of acts”, but a “unified

domain”, a “continent of knowledge”, a *thing* with causes and effects (Weeks 12).

Historically, discursive forces shaping sexuality include modern medicine, natural sciences and law, among others, taking into account economic and social changes, as they in turn prompt “new class alignments, changes in the social environment, urbanisation, and a disruption of settled and traditional patterns” (Weeks 13). Generally, it must be remarked that changes in the economic system have always affected gender roles, how they have related to each other, especially shifting “their relations of dominance and subordination and altered the significance, materially and ideologically, of the family” (Weeks 13).

Additionally, it is helpful to think of, how Weeks calls it, formal as well as informal modes of social regulation of sexuality: not simply state and religious institutions hold discursive power over the “regulation of marriage, divorce, illegitimacy, incest, sexual unorthodoxy”, because informal ways these social categories are regulated must also be acknowledged (Weeks 13). Here he notes how peer-group regulation of adolescent courtship can substantially affect patterns of sexuality, keeping the illegitimacy rates low, for instance, regulating the timing of marriage and the importance given to celibacy and restraint” (ibid.).

Furthermore, Weeks offers us a compelling argument for looking at sexuality in terms of discursive historicity, rather than exploring it through Freudian or naturalist frameworks when he writes that

both [naturalist and Freudian] approaches are an 'essentialist' view of sexuality; sex is conceptualized as an overpowering force in the individual that shapes not only the personal but the social life as well. It is seen as a driving, instinctual force, whose characteristics are built into the biology of the human animal, which shapes human institutions and whose will must force its way out, either in the form of sexual expression or, if blocked, in the form of perversion or neurosis. (Weeks 2)

As Weeks goes on, this view of sexuality is firmly common-sensical, heterosexual and male (3), as well as 'transhistorical' in the sense that a psychological view of sexuality firmly rests upon the presupposition that sexual drives exist outside of culture (4), which would make an opening up of the field of sexuality to interrogate its workings as a category or social control simply impossible. Specifically, an essentialist framework of sexuality would ignore “the many relationships sexuality has to other, nonsexual aspects of culture, especially its grounding in economic change and its role in maintaining systems of social inequality” (D'Emilio and

Freedman xiv), while “anxieties about race, class, ethnicity, gender, nation, and sexuality [...] have played out through the site of adolescent sexuality and the adolescent body” (Cocca xiv).

Arguably, sexuality remains, next to age, a social category that is being deconstructed and wrested out of its natural state, being one of the last naturalized categories that have been stubbornly hard to question until Foucault's concept of discourse (Weeks 3). This concept is especially applicable to my analysis when I will show in my analysis how teenage sexuality is indeed “organized not through mechanisms of 'repression' but through powers of 'incitement', definition and regulation” (Weeks 5). This kind of discursive, productive control entails the reinforcement of doing, understanding and behaving in a certain ways rather than others.

When taking into account Foucault's central axis of power and knowledge, and that this power-knowledge dynamic is realized in a creative rather than inhibiting manner, Weeks argues that when talking about “a history of our discourses about sexuality” one should not emphasize the silence, but rather focus on the “constant, and historically changing deployment of discourses on sex, [...which] is part of the complex growth of control over individuals through the apparatus of sexuality” (7). This aspect of growing control is especially relevant to us, as an historical perspective of sexuality has often invited the view that past conservatism has been overcome by liberal freedom of sexuality. However, “the history of sexuality, as others, is not a linear history from dark, conservative ignorance to enlightened and liberal freedom” (D'Emilio and Freedman XI). This will become an integral part of my critical analysis, as I will have to question even those seemingly liberating, yet pedagogizing discourses that promote comprehensive sexual education in order to empower teenagers in their sexual agency, as well as *16 and Pregnant*, which claims to give pregnant teenagers a voice that was unheard before.

Because of its taboo and naturalized status, an in depth, a relational and new history of sexuality in America is still largely unwritten, although D'Emilio and Freedman, in their work *Intimate Matters*, offer the first comprehensive overview of how attitudes and discourses of sexuality in America have changed over the last 300 years (xiv). The historical definition of sexuality, as well as its many possible meanings, can be found to more or less coexist next to each other, while certain meanings are dominant in certain time periods (D'Emilio and Freedman xv). The most notable shift in the history of sexuality is the very recent separation of sexuality and reproduction – even though men and women experienced this shift differently – with the now 'dominant' meaning of sexuality constituting 'individual pleasure' (D'Emilio and

Freedman xvi). This shift, as they argue, is tightly linked to “commercialized sexuality in the modern period, when sexual relations are expected to provide personal identity and individual happiness, apart from reproduction” (D’Emilio and Freedman xi).

Until the 1970s, sexuality had been mainly studied from medical, psychological and biological perspectives, and only with WWII, academic study of sexuality saw a social turn as social scientists and anthropologists began to embed sexuality in sociocultural structures (D’Emilio and Freedman xii). This shift in academic discourses and societal attitudes towards sexual permissiveness (Costello 258) and further gender equality (Costello 273) through women’s employment became important, as it led to the legalization of abortion for the first time in American history, as well as the furthering of equal social and economic status for both genders, although not fully. Still, Costello qualifies this time period as “the most significant social revolution of the twentieth century – a revolution that is far from over” (Costello 274). D’Emilio and Freedman note that the decades after WWII saw a decrease in marriage age for both genders, as well as the permissiveness making high school and dating experience a new introductory phase for marriage (261).

This shift towards greater sexual permissiveness led to what D’Emilio and Freedman describe as a sexualization of American society in the 1960s, not simply because sex became commodified and omnipresent, but because sex and sexuality became a greater “source for personal meaning” (327) and sexual identity rose to become the most important part that socially and culturally defines identity formation. Additionally, sex is entering the capitalist market between 1960s and 1980s, “the capitalist impulse seized upon sexual desire as an unmet need that the marketplace could fill” (ibid.). This omnipresence and newly refocused importance of sexuality and the mainstreaming of sexual imagery (D’Emilio and Freedman 328) is relevant for my analysis because it coincided with the creation of the cultural category of the teenager which is a distinctively American term in its origin and marked by the disposable income the ‘baby boom’ generation had available (Osgerby 46). Even with dating emerging as a socially acceptable ritual for teenagers, adults generally opposed teenage sexuality; dating with set limits was permitted, with the expectation that girls should not tread beyond those limits (D’Emilio and Freedman 264), with female chastity constituting a middle class standard (D’Emilio and Freedman 263).

According to Jackson, historical accounts of childhood sexuality overwhelmingly record

adult regulation of teenage sexuality (Jackson 231), perhaps because noteworthy records were most likely kept by institutionalized authorities rather than children or adolescents themselves. However obvious this observation might be, it is already indicative of the particular way children and adolescents have been constituted in their subject position within Western societies. Jackson poignantly tells us that “constituted as legal dependents within the modern Western state, children have been positioned as a subaltern group; the historical record suggests they have been silenced and subjugated to a disciplinary regime” (231). Of course, I have to concede that childhood is not purely a social category constructed to subjugate the better part of society; rather, it must be understood that “inequalities between adults and young people are physical and material as well as structural and cultural” (Jackson 244). Complete reliance on adults, while a very material dependence, is coupled with being “socialized into adult cultures in which they occupy a position as subordinate or 'subaltern'” (ibid.). Still, this analysis must be wary of assuming a totalitarian viewpoint, as not to overlook the existing cultural power struggles – which in this analysis is the key site of sexuality – along the axes of age and gender.

The discourses that give shape to the cultural constructions of what it means to be a child or an adolescent have been religion, medicine, law, various pedagogical guides directed at parents, as well as education curricula for children and adolescents (Jackson 232). Even though those discursive formations are often establishing their own ways of knowing, they should not be viewed as completely separate, but rather as interlinking and overlapping in how they have construct the cultural category of childhood and adolescence (ibid.). Taking a closer look at the current institutionalized and pedagogical ways in which adolescent sexuality is shaped is of utmost importance – which I will do throughout the analysis of *16 and Pregnant's* connection to the debate over teaching comprehensive sexual education vs. abstinence-only, *The National Campaign* and its affiliated website *StayTeen.org* –, as Foucault made a point out of what he called a “paedagogization of children's sex”, identifying educational efforts as the chief discursive formation to shape how we understand childhood and adolescent sexuality (Jackson 234). Indeed, Foucault noted how ambiguously control was exercised over children's sexuality: “On the one hand a child's sexual activity was recognized as an inevitability if left unchecked; on the other [hand], the 'good' child did not entertain impure thoughts. Thus sexuality in children was both 'natural' and 'normal' and 'perverse' or 'contrary to nature’” (Jackson 234).

In addition to this, in late modernity the individualized 'sense-of self' became a new,

important source for identity formation, next to the social categories of 'race', ethnicity, class and gender (Jackson 232). Children and adolescents were effectively excluded from the very capability of identity formation, as

this new sense of self was articulated through memory and personal history; identity was seen as a trajectory from youth to maturity. In relation to this emphasis on the autobiographical, childhood in general and one's own infancy in particular represented the 'golden age' or position of sexual innocence from which one had embarked on life's journey. The child was seen to some extent as the core essence of self but it was also that which was lost through adulthood [...]. (ibid.)

Although this is a Victorian sentiment, it can be argued that this romanticized and naturalized state of infantile innocence is still at the very core of the cultural category of childhood and adolescence, as is particularly visible whenever that presumed innocence has to be protected from outside influence (Jackson 233). Indeed, the 18th century saw “a new concern with childhood in middle class ideology and practice. A conceptualization of the separateness of children went hand in hand with the socially felt need to protect their purity and innocence. They became a form of property to be admired and cuddled, to be cared for and above all protected [...]” (48). The liminal phase of adolescence that separated childhood from adulthood was not yet existent, which was marked by children already being cast into seemingly mature gender roles, as well as dressing them “as miniature adults, complete with all external manifestations of masculinity and femininity; exposed to the social aspects adult sexuality earlier than modern children, they probably had much less difficulty in coping with their own biological changes” (ibid.).

The formidable and long lasting validity of Victorian concepts about childhood is confirmed by historical demographer Philippe Ariès who in the 1960s noted that contemporary understandings of childhood and adolescence

had been constructed during the eighteenth century in relation to shifts in sensibility surrounding sexuality. [...] An earlier 'immodest' encouragement of children's sexual interest was replaced with an emphasis on childhood as a state of pre-lapsarian innocence and 'a true reflection of divine purity'; children required careful protection and education so as not to become contaminated beings. (ibid.)

Here it is palpable where psychological, naturalizing discourses of age and sexuality not only

intersect, but in fact are interdependent in how sexuality greatly affects Western understandings of age. Moreover, the threat to such childhood and pre-adult innocence has put increased focus on concerns over pedophilia, which can be observed to have been used as a controlling force of keeping childhood sexuality within the confines of innocence in the Victorian era (Jackson 233). The seemingly inexorable insistence on childhood asexuality and purity, as James Kincaid argued, has brought along its “commodification and fetishization” (ibid).

More recently, childhood and adolescence became denaturalized, historicized sociocultural categories that defy any intrinsically 'natural' state of being, adding them to the other social categories that have been increasingly viewed through the perspective of social constructivism rather than natural processes (Jackson 231). However, despite this sociological turn when conceptualizing age, 'children' and 'adolescents' are often conflated terms and treated in much the same way – even academically – when it comes to sexuality (Cocca xiii). This conflation reflects fear, anxiety and moral panic among people when children or adolescents could come into contact with sexuality, which is often used for political and social power, regardless whether it has the power to improve adolescents legal or social situation (see Danesi 25, DasGupta, D'Emilio and Freedman 347, Furstenberg 74, O'Brien and Szeman 69, Weeks 14). Cocca notes how deeply entrenched this fear of putting children in danger of sexuality when reporting that putting the subject of adolescent sexuality to research is seen as controversial: “those who research and write about the subject – while praised by many – have been regularly criticized as subverting religious and moral values, endangering the welfare of children, and even endorsing sexual abuse” (xiii). This disconnect of nature and the sociocultural category of adolescents and children as understood in Western society becomes increasingly clear when Jackson notes that “the terms 'child' or 'infant', 'boy' or 'girl', 'lad' or 'lass' do not necessarily imply youth at all; rather they may be used to denote an individual's position as subordinate or even to denote intimacy” (231).

The historicity of the meaning adolescence in Western society is further evidenced by the changing terms which are commonly used: “‘juvenile’ (nineteenth century), ‘young person’ or ‘adolescent’ (early twentieth century) and ‘teenager’ (late twentieth century)” (Jackson 232). This further exposes 'age' as more than a natural or biological state of the body and puts it within a socially constructed category that is part of modern identity formation (Jackson 232). Notable as the first instance of medical discourse on adolescence which reached the public was

with G. Stanley Hall's publication of *Adolescence* in 1904, at the same time coining the usage of the term and defining it as referring to “the 'rapid spurt of growth in body, mind [and] feelings' that take place during puberty” (Jackson 234). The medical understanding of this liminal phase between childhood and adulthood was actively reshaping the until then existent conceptual dichotomy of childhood and adulthood (ibid.). Most importantly to my analysis, however, it introduced an in-between stage of innocence and sexual maturity that was closely related to psychological notions of the relationship between mind and body. The onset of puberty, before Hall's publication, was defined through social status rather than physical change of the body and mind (Weeks 49). In this sense, adolescence stands as a medicalization of the social and cultural construction of youth, which overlaps with the medicalization of sexual identity, making it a “permanent reality” (Rivkin 896), “as an *identity*, an essential part of a person's character” (O'Brien and Szeman 182).

Even though one might view the introduction of adolescence as a medical, psychological and cultural category as a necessary disruption the childhood/adulthood dichotomy, Jackson argues that historically Western society was unable to acknowledge and discuss this liminal position between innocence and sexual maturity, as well as vulnerability and responsibility (Jackson 250). This, Jackson points out, applies to the construction of both genders, mainly due to the fact that “the labeling of adolescence as a developmental stage – promoted through psychological study – was not reflected in frameworks that accorded legal responsibility” (Jackson 250). Thus, the law must be considered as another competing discourse that is involved in the struggle over defining power of adolescent sexuality. In this instance, legal frameworks are most likely slower to change and therefore prone to reflecting older, 'traditional' views that were promoted by moral outcries – as, for instance, by the 'Moral Majority' in the 1980s (D'Emilio and Freedman 362) – and pushed to change social policy that are partly clashing with psychological frameworks which demarcated the struggle of understanding sexuality in a scientific rather than socially conservative or political way.

Indeed, one prominent legal and cultural concept of an 'age of consent' has come to greatly shape discourses of acceptable teenage sexuality and furthermore configures youth as feminine (Jackson 235). Those who fall below this age are culturally marked as lacking sexual agency and possessing innocence, which are both cultural notions that historically have been put in gendered terms (ibid.). During the 19th century, adult, female subjectivity has been

increasingly infantilized, while at the same time childhood, in turn, has become conceived of as more and more feminine (ibid.). Further underscoring this gendered construction of an 'age of consent', and with it sexual agency, is the fact that there are the differing ages that apply to young males and females, as in "New York City the female age of consent was raised from ten to sixteen in 1886 and to eighteen in 1916" (Jackson 236). Jackson further points out that the "innocence of childhood has been central to the modern condition – despite Freudian challenges and interventions – because of its fixed legal status. If the 'normal' modern sexual subject has been positioned as an adult who can consent as a sexual actor or agent from a position of knowledge, then legal discourses have consistently located the young child in terms of lack: as victims or objects who are unable to consent because of innocence or ignorance" (Jackson 251).

While 19th century developments in medicine and psychology have contributed their part to shift the gendered construction of innocence, the most important discursive shift for this discussion is that those young, sexually active females who were being viewed as 'victims' in the 19th century, were now being seen as a 'problem' that needed to be dealt with (Jackson 238). These 'problem girls' were not simply sexually promiscuous, prone to disease or moral failure; their problematic existence extended into the social sphere and thus became to be seen as also problematic on a larger scale, reaching beyond the actions of an individual: "concerns were expressed through the language of eugenics that they would become 'problem mothers' of 'problem families'" (ibid.). This put both discourses of the feminine as well as childhood, both constructed to be possessing 'innocence' and 'virtue' – into imminent danger of being tainted by sexuality (Jackson 235). This paradoxical duality of childhood and adolescent sexuality was part of middle class ideology from the 19th century onwards, as the "middle-class family was a peculiar combination for it both stressed the innocence of childhood, its asexuality, *and* its potentiality for sexual corruption, with all the horrors that opened up" (Weeks 51). After the introduction of adolescence, the urgency "to prevent this 'premature interest'" was so strongly felt "that the family, and its moralists, were so anxious to concern themselves with sexual manifestations. But by a typical return, the anxiety and concern created rather than alleviated the 'problem' [...]" (Weeks 52). How this fear is also present in the narratives that *16 and Pregnant* provides us with in its first season will be discussed within the analysis chapter.

Perhaps paradoxically, this heavy focus the Victorian era has put on the assumed

intrinsic innocence of youth has led not only to the desire to protect youth, but has also constructed it as something lost and unattainable for adults, which, ultimately has rendered it desirable and, by extension, erotic (Jackson 245). As Jackson states, in contemporary Britain the discussion about sexual responsibility still revolves around ages and specific sexual acts rather than matters of sexual agency and rights, which exemplifies how the “tension between the desire to protect children from abuse by constructing them as vulnerable and the need to recognize the self-determination of young people has not been resolved” (ibid.). By extension, then, understandings of childhood and adolescent sexuality can be argued to have a wider impact on general discourses of sexuality, as modern Western conception lay great influence on these “formative stages in the growth of sexual and self awareness as well as their construction as periods of susceptibility to sexual danger” (Jackson 250). This is echoed in what Brooks-Gunn and Furstenberg have identified as the 'curious lens of American sexual culture', as “teenagers come to acquire and organize their sexual identity [... which] is influenced by the prevailing belief that sexual behavior is fraught with danger and morally wrong but is uncontrollable and irresistible at the same time” (60). Simultaneously, however, it bears repeating that the concept of identity, as well as sexual identity, has been promoted by legal, pedagogical, as well as medical discursive formations, which “firmly entrenches it as a fundamental principle in Western society” (O'Brien and Szeman 180), not simply through institutionalized power, but rather “compelling to us as individuals [... in] the way in which our own needs and desires are interpellated, or addressed by those institutions, which leads us to internalize a sense of identity as something we simply cannot do without” (O'Brien and Szeman 181).

This paradoxical simultaneity of the teenager standing between the inability of self-work and the compelling requirement of identity formation through sexuality, which has been a 'highly charged' field of discursive struggle, not just over deviant identities, but also when it comes to “socially regulated (patriarchal, monogamous, married) heterosexuality” (ibid.). This is further complicated by the American understandings of

adolescents and even young adults (age eighteen to twenty-one) as developmentally incapable of acting responsibly and actively attempt to protect them from behaviors that might be considered risky, especially access to alcohol and sex. Europeans, by contrast, believe that young people ought to be taught to manage these potential risks by gradually introducing them to adult-like responsibilities during their teenage years.

Whereas Americans view adolescence as a period of rebellion and irresponsibility, European are inclined to expect adolescents to behave more like adults – at least in regard to their sexual behavior, European adolescents appear to do so. (Furstenberg 103)

The idea of too-early, female promiscuity creating 'problem girls' and then 'problem families' is still visible within the current problematization of teenage pregnancy in America. Brooks-Gunn and Furstenberg claim that the concern over teenage sexuality is, in fact, closely linked to teenage pregnancy and what “societal and individual cost” it has as consequences (59), perhaps also because the US have a significantly higher teenage pregnancy rate than other industrialized countries (Brooks-Gunn and Furstenberg 66). Despite this statistical oddity, addressing and acknowledging teenage sexuality was still such a taboo that only with the deadly advent of AIDS, it was starting to become framed as not only a social, but also a public health problem, with one organization stating “that the new sense of urgency created by the epidemic was accomplishing 'what one million teenage pregnancies couldn't do: get us talking about sex’” (D'Emilio and Freedman 357).

Within this moment of taking up teenage pregnancy as a social and public health problem, political as well as academic discourse has been constructing it “in terms of health”, “as problematic because of associated welfare expenditure” and “as mediating the intergenerational transmission of poverty” (Bonell 255). Within Bonell's review of academic and quantitative research dealing with teenage pregnancy in both the U. S. and the U. K., he points out that the conceptualization of teenage pregnancy in these terms in the U. S. is noteworthy because they have garnered national attention at a time when teenage pregnancy rates have been consistently falling (ibid.). He argues that not teenage pregnancy in itself is a social problem, but how society responds to it in terms of health care, education and welfare, as well as social stigma associated with unplanned and teenaged pregnancies (Bonell 256). Politically, the shift to focusing on 'preventing' teen pregnancy occurred as it became socially unacceptable to stigmatize unmarried mothers and their children born out of wedlock (ibid.), while “economic-focused research tended to see teenage pregnancy largely as a reflection of wider societal ills” (Bonell 268). This is a perhaps unsurprising dynamic, when taking note how from the very beginning of its conception, “the teenager' has always been a source of anxiety for adult America, because within it traditional family values have been most keenly tested and contested” (Fiske, *Media* 115).

A further voice critical of constructing teenage pregnancy as a social and public health problem of epidemic proportions is the American sociologist Furstenberg. He claims the phenomenon was misunderstood by academic researchers, as well as public policy makers, when wanting to 'solve' a problem which has been wrongly framed by and misunderstood by social scientists as a rise in teenage promiscuity that must be curbed (Furstenberg 23). Rather, he argues, the fact that teenagers were merely a visible minority that “switched from having marital to nonmarital births [...and] this pattern quickly was adopted by older women as well” (ibid.). This, then, resulted in increasing nonmarital birth rates, a rising statistic within which “teenagers, in effect, were wrongly singled out as demographically deviant from the rest of the population” (Furstenberg 13). While this still helped advocates increasing the accessibility of reproductive and sexual health services to sexually active teens, it has to be acknowledged that having done this under the guise of a teenage pregnancy epidemic

created an impression that teenage childbearing was on the rise, obscuring the fact that marriage no longer provided the safety net that it once had when premarital pregnancy occurred. In fact, fewer teenagers were getting pregnant, but so many more remained single that teenage parenthood became synonymous with single parenthood. This helped to fashion a social stereotype of teenage mothers as socially deviant. (Furstenberg 16)

The need to be critical of the discourses and their assumptions which created teenage pregnancy as a social and public health problem, despite advocating what could be deemed a progressive empowerment of teenaged sexual agency, is shown in a recent study by the University of Maryland (Gee). In this study, comprehensive sexual education – instead of abstinence-only education – did not prove itself to be the solution to curbing teenage pregnancy rates as “it doesn’t address the underlying social problems” (ibid.). In fact, concurring with Furstenberg's critique, the study finds that instead of creating or perpetuating intergenerational poverty, “teenage girls growing up in poverty don't see a downside to pregnancy [... which] implies that the girls most likely to get pregnant are already living in the social conditions that lead to conditions of poverty” (ibid).

The ways in which all these historically dominant, as well as emergent streams of discourses are shaping the representations of teenage sexuality in *16 and Pregnant's* TV textuality, and in how far it is possible to evaluate its role within discourses shaping teenage sexuality in contemporary America, will be discussed in the following chapter.

3. The 'Honest, Unpleasant Truth': MTV's *16 & Pregnant* between Subverting and Reiterating Culturally Dominant Discourses

The American RTV show *16 and Pregnant* was first broadcast in 2009 on MTV, and was one of the first television formats to thematically focus on pregnant teenagers and their life stories. This is remarkable for many reasons, but primarily because it remained hugely popular, managing to create several spin off series that run parallel to the original *16 and Pregnant*, while at the same time inspiring other RTV shows to put a spotlight on pregnancy: *My Teen Is Pregnant And So Am I* (2012, TLC), *Pregnant and Dating* (2013, WE TV), *I'm Having Their Baby* (2012, Oxygen) and *Married to Medicine* (2013, Bravo TV), along with *16 and Pregnant* currently running in its fifth season (Morrissey).

Merely glancing at these titles already gives provides a brief glimpse of the many facets of experiencing pregnancy and human sexuality that RTV is currently tapping into. Whether the main purpose of these is to entertain, shock, provoke or shed light on more unfamiliar paths of women's experiences, *16 and Pregnant* sets itself apart in one remarkable way: it was conceived to educate. The show's creator, Lauren Dolgen, explicitly campaigned for the show's pedagogical agenda from the onset, calling *16 and Pregnant* one of the “best public service campaigns to prevent teen pregnancy” (Dolgen). Reading a magazine featuring a story about a celebrity teenage pregnancy caused Dolgen to think of the “750,000 other teenage girls who get pregnant each year in the U.S., the ones who were not from wealthy, famous families” (ibid.).

As much as the existing literature on *16 and Pregnant* criticizes the show for failing its initially considerable potential as a feminist text (Guglielmo and Stewart 19), it is relevant to note that Dolgen's intention was exactly what her show was criticized for failing to accomplish: lending a voice to unheard pregnant teenage girls' stories “without passing judgment in a way that could start a real dialogue about the issue” (Dolgen). Critics argue that in addition to the failure to highlight issues of gender, race, class, and poverty, Guglielmo and Stewart contend that *16 and Pregnant* simply maintains and reiterates the stereotypes common to the public debate of teen pregnancy and sex education instead of opening up a 'real dialogue' (19). However, it could be argued that the show's feminist potential fails largely due to its clearly

prescriptive, pedagogical purpose, as Dolgen herself states how the program “shows the challenges of too-early parenthood”, as well as wanting to show “the honest, unpleasant truth of teen pregnancy in America – the whole truth. It's not a fairy tale where every girl ends up with the American dream – a loving husband, a white picket fence and the career they've always hoped for” (Dolgen). The fact that *16 and Pregnant*'s creator uses unambiguously normative language – casting teen pregnancy in anything *but* a position to be judged outside of normative boundaries – is somewhat foreshadowing the conflicting role the show potentially could to inhabit; it could empower pregnant teenagers by lending them higher visibility and a voice, while, at the same time, it appears to be representing the lives of those pregnant teenagers as “an overly moralistic cautionary tale” (Guglielmo 45) which is firmly placed within the pedagogizing discourses of childhood and adolescent sexuality (Jackson 232, 234, Weeks 48).

Despite this critique, paradoxically so, Dolgen defends the show as handling the 'epidemic' of teenage pregnancy in a responsible and 'nuanced' way by teaming up with *The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy* (*The National Campaign*, from here on out) a non-profit, non-partisan organization based in Washington, mainly funded by private donors, as well as the *Center for Disease Control* (CDC). As a powerful and active authority on the matter, *The National Campaign* has been involved in several TV shows to spread its message of the importance of fighting teenage pregnancy in such a way that it would effectively reach young viewers. Popular American TV series, such as *Raising Hope* (FOX), *The Secret Life of the American Teenager* (ABC Family), *Family Guy* (FOX), *How I Met Your Mother* (CBS) have been asked to work with *The National Campaign* in order to create teenage pregnancy storylines (Guglielmo 210). In addition to this, *The National Campaign* has been in charge of the major online presences that offer advice geared towards a teenage audience on sex, sexuality and pregnancy, with *StayTeen.org* being one of them (ibid.). How *The National Campaign* and *StayTeen.org* serve as surrounding, informing sites of pedagogical and political discourse to *16 and Pregnant*'s representations of teenage sexuality will be discussed at the end of this chapter, as it represents the current discursive struggle of whether teenage pregnancy should be understood as a public health issue or one of failed personal decision making of inherently irresponsible, immature teenagers prematurely trespassing into *adult* sexuality.

In the rest of this chapter, I will focus on RTV and its genre conventions, the TV textualities of narration, point of view, as well as editing, before finally taking a closer at

relational dynamics and talk between the teenagers of *16 and Pregnant* and their parents, as well as teenage narrators and their audience. This portion of the analysis will focus on the language used when talking about teen sex in order to discover the relational story-world discourse that is created within the text. Here, questions of power and authority, through closer analysis of the character's ways of interacting and negotiating, will be discussed thoroughly.

3.1. RTV: *16 and Pregnant*'s gendered verisimilitude

The genre of RTV is not simply an emergent TV format of the 2000s. Although the rise of RTV as a genre can not be overstated in terms of its continuing market domination – Toby Miller cites that as much as 20% of American TV between 2001 and 2008 were RTV formats – it is important to specifically identify it as the struggling medium's way to recapture teenagers as its audience in a time when Internet technologies became an ever more popular platform for not just sharing information, but also genre-crossing entertainment (Miller 160, Attallah 332). As Miller (160) and Osgerby (27) claim, teenagers should be considered an economic force to be reckoned with, even in the current economic recession. As Bill Osgerby has pointed out, American mass media since World War II has gradually created a distinctive, as well as symbolically iconic image of the American teenagers and their lifestyles which gained wider significance as a “vehicle for comment on broader patterns of social change, with young people both celebrated as the exciting precursor to a prosperous future and (sometimes simultaneously) vilified as the most deplorable evidence of woeful cultural decline” (28). Indeed, it is important to this analysis to restate that the concept of the teenager itself is a recent phenomenon that sprung from a very specific time and place, making it an intimately American, as well as primarily economic category which then developed into a cultural category of identity during its rise in the middle of the 20th century (Davis and Dickinson 2). Even more importantly, this economic conception, which was driven by the baby boom generation, was “in close synchronisation with the rise of television as a widely consumed domestic medium” (Davis and Dickinson 2), rendering the exploration of teenage sexuality on TV not only highly relevant, but an incredibly complex yet logical field to be exploring at a time when youth culture is in the process of becoming decentered from the medium of TV through the shift towards more interactive and increasingly popular mediums, such as Videogames as well as the Internet.

This very beginning of the cultural as well as economic conception of the American teenager sets the formative background for the genre of *16 and Pregnant* for a very compelling reason. According to market researchers, a group very interested in keeping a close eye on the potential teenage market, the teenaged 'millennial generation' of the 2000s stood at 31.6 million, nearly 6 per cent higher than the 'baby boomer' peak of 29.9 million in 1976" (Davis and Dickinson 83). Taking into consideration the interdependent relationship between the rise of mass media and TV in concert with the American youth culture, it can be argued that teenagers are "liberated and constrained by the mass media at one and the same time—it provides them with the canvass, but the only oils they can use to paint that canvass are consumerist ones" (Miles, 2000, p. 85 quoted in Osgerby 52). Rather than assuming this connection between youth cultures of the 50s and 60s and TV to have evaporated into recent history, it is relevant to recognize the immense analytical value of investigating RTV in connection to discourses of American teenage sexuality as a highly relevant, albeit complex interrogation of representations which stretch across several interdependent, discursive levels. Thus, this thesis will only have time to touch upon, but not fully explore the important political and economic discourses on teenage sexuality in more depth, as other authors have already done so (see Bagdikian, Bonell, Croteau and Hoynes, Murray and Ouellette, Skeggs and Wood, Woltersdorff).

The last decade saw an unprecedented rise in the popularity and sheer wealth of RTV programming. This resulted in a piqued interest of academia to explore this rich new site of cultural meaning production. Skeggs and Wood, in their recent empirical research study entitled *Reacting to Reality Television. Performance, Audience and Value* (2012), describe this phenomenon succinctly and pointedly in noting the "zeal with which television executives seize on the easy replicability of formats is matched by the eagerness of audiences to present themselves as participants for others to watch and criticize" (1-2). The latter part is how RTV as a genre has proven time and time again to spark a fierce, emotional reaction not just in its audience, but also across the media spectrum all the way across Internet platforms, most often due to is unabashed showcasing and dramatization of provocative content (Skeggs and Wood 2). This observation arguably reaches new, precarious heights of provocation when *16 and Pregnant* centers around two interdependent terrains of discursive struggle – age and sexuality. That these two categories of social formation, together with a format that specializes in showing its audience intimate, emotionally raw content, provides fertile ground for a moral panic over

what teenage sexuality can mean, or is *supposed* to mean.

TV and the impression of realism

Even in academic reception, RTV has received polarized reactions, often configuring it as “representative of a decline in journalistic standards or celebrate it as a sign of a newly feminized public sphere, [when] reality programming should frankly be understood as a cost-cutting measure and an instance of niche marketing” (Miller 161-162). Despite this critique, scholars go so far as to argue that “reality television was the solution to an economic crisis. The explosion of reality television can be traced to its commercial success in generating audiences through low production costs” (Skeggs and Wood 22). Certainly, another factor contributing to the replicability of the format, is that it is relatively cheap to produce due to participants usually being unpaid – as opposed to paid actors – rather, they are given rewards, financial perks or the simple promise of fame (Skeggs and Wood 2-3). While exactly this has sparked criticism about 'glamorizing' pregnancy for a teenaged audience (Dockertman, Henson, Sun), supposedly inspiring teenage girls to become pregnant in order to gain a spot on the show and become famous, it must be identified as a double edged sword. The financial incentives received for participating in the show often reduce the risk of poverty for teenage parents, however, this risk of poverty constitutes something that is intimately embedded within the current political and pedagogical discourses arguing for preventing teenage pregnancy. This, advocates argue, should be achieved by making it a social and public health issue which is a debate that will be discussed at the end of this chapter.

While the issue of slashing costs of production certainly helped spark TV networks' interest in producing more RTV formats, the genre's existence should not be seen in a purely economical frame. There are other, very compelling textual features and ways that the genre of RTV offer new ways of addressing and engaging an audience, which should not be overlooked. Skeggs and Wood's empirical research study suggests that RTV in general appears to offer 'lessons' in the way that it provides its audience with

incitements for 'ordinary' people to perform their own self-awareness, self-work and ultimately self-transformation, operating as a technology of governmentality, and making the self's value visible to others. It offered instructions to audiences which are useful in a current neo-liberal epoch where the motif of self-responsibility assists in the withdrawal of state support and in generating bodies ripe for the conditions of the

flexible labour market. (Skeggs and Wood 4)

This embeds the genre of RTV firmly within the “broader social and economic climate of so-called neo-liberal individualization, a technology of governmentality, where the emphasis upon spectacular selfhood often diverted attention away from the structural conditions in which anyone can freely perform 'being themselves'” (Skeggs and Wood 3). While other RTV formats, such as talent casting shows, fit more clearly into this description, it still applies to *16 and Pregnant* with minor differences. How *16 and Pregnant*'s RTV textualities implore not just the teenaged participants in the show, but also their audience, to assume a subject position, and with it individualization and governmentality, will be discussed later during the analysis.

The most compelling argument Skeggs and Wood present is that RTV's textuality brings a specific shape to the meanings it produces about the self and how it can be constructed through an unprecedented 'immediacy' and 'emotionality' which is important to explore if one wants to gain a deeper understanding about how the genre can evoke such fierce reactions (Skeggs and Wood 4). Feminist scholars make the private public, ethical, moral and political, as RTV in its emotional intensity “is *precisely* a site where socio-political questions of the nation and the moral are shaped” (Skeggs and Wood 26). Coming back to the analytical question raised before – how *16 and Pregnant*'s role or within streams of discourses on teenage sexuality can be evaluated without dismissal or overestimation of its influence – is seemingly gaining greater analytical value through this perspective.

When considering TV's – and now RTV's – insistence of immediacy and 'nowness', realism needs to be understood as a certain way of knowing and understanding, rather than *what* the content of this understanding might be (Fiske 24). RTV very often utilizes 'documentary conventions' which connote unmediated reality in foremost technological ways: using a mobile, hand-held digital camera rather than professional studio equipment; not using any specific lighting instead of 'natural' light, as well as sound that is recorded while on location and not in a studio (Bignell 222); it is these “shaky, tilted, real-time representations whose low-technicity urges us to believe them” (Fiske, *Media* 127).

Additionally, these technological, aesthetic devices are used to create a more 'natural' *impression* of realism, which is strongly connected to the fierce, emotional evocative potential within RTV (Skeggs and Wood 2). At the same time, RTV programs are still expected to follow already established TV conventions – such as establishing a story-line that follows a clear line

of argument (Bignell 221). The element of story, even in a TV text that claims to be 'realistic' and 'authentic', cannot be abandoned, which is why this stylistic impression of realism can often be observed together with elements of TV melodrama: a voice over narration to guide the viewer's understanding of what is shown, a clear, narrative structure as well as contrastive editing (Bignell 222). How these textualities work in *16 and Pregnant* to create the illusion of realism will be analyzed in the following subchapter.

Right from the very first episode, *16 and Pregnant* establishes its very specific textuality as an RTV format. The audience follows the show's participants from a seemingly unobserved position which in a cinematographic style known as 'fly-on-the-wall'. Adding to that is the low-tech quality of the footage – natural lighting and cramped shots are the basic visual vocabulary of *16 and Pregnant's* TV aesthetic – but high in definition when it comes to conveying the intimacy of the situations. The cameras used are most likely digital and hand held, but appear to be divided among more than one camera man, providing the audience with an all-seeing eye that captures the teens' day-to-day lives in great detail. This is important because it firmly identifies *16 and Pregnant* as a realistic TV genre. According to Fiske, the way the TV texts imbue the spectator “with a position of all-knowingness from which we can understand and evaluate the various discourses of the narrative” is what must be primarily recognized when considering the ways in which TV is constructing its impression of realism (25). This is achieved through visual conventions of the way TV tells its stories, how the camera, music and editing constructs 'the real' for the viewer. In this instance, the viewer is placed in an omniscient position that remains outside of the story, creating the impression for the audience that they are “watching a piece of unmediated reality directly, that the camera does not exist” (Fiske 30).

Furthermore, the fact that the camera 'does not exist' within the TV codes of *16 and Pregnant* is highly relevant because it puts the

viewer in a position of apparent dominance and control over the represented reality offered by television's discourses about reality. Realist television discourse resolves contradictions by representing a unified and rational world of causes and effects, actions and consequences, moral choices and rewards or punishments. It distances the viewer from the contradictory and ambiguous dynamics of reality and suggests that political action to intervene in the ways that reality is produced from day to day is unnecessary. (Bignell 218)

Thus, it already becomes apparent that *16 and Pregnant's* genre and stylistic conventions are never simply economically efficient or 'neutral', even if a narrative wants to

present itself as exactly that. Narrative structure, as well as specific TV textualities that configure something as 'real' are reliant on ideological assumptions, such as the conventions of voice over narration or commentary to lend what is shown credibility and authenticity (Bignell 222), an additional textuality I will be exploring in more depth later on.

Even though the *16 and Pregnant*'s shooting style is 'typical' for that of RTV, there are a few instances where a breaking of 'realist' conventions could be detected, yet are firmly embedded within the differing TV genre conventions of drama and melodrama, such as narration, a clear narrative structure and contrastive editing. Even though the show's style and format clearly strives to capture the pregnant teenage girls' lives 'in-the-moment' with an incredible sense of immediacy, this immediacy always constitutes a constructed impression, and should be considered less authentic, but rather appropriate within this particular TV genre. The breaking of these 'realist' RTV codes becomes apparent when *16 and Pregnant* lingers on those moments of conflict and struggles of the day-to-day balancing act of being a teenage parent, yet cut to events that happened six weeks later without much of a transition or summary of what happened in those close to two months. How these cuts and editing choices matter when constructing representations of teenage sexuality in *16 and Pregnant* will be discussed later on.

Those analytical points are salient to this discussion as, according to Fiske, the form of realism eventually defuses even radical content, familiarizing potentially counter-heteronormative discourses in ways that extinguish the urge for further inquiry, mainly through positioning the audience as omniscient; "there is nothing more to know" (Fiske 38). Moreover, this can be further ascribed to "[...] realism's inability to deal with the real as contradictory. Contradictions that may exist in reality are inevitably resolved in realism by the discourse at the top of the hierarchy" (Fiske 26). This is of immense analytical relevance to this thesis, as "discursive power is hidden, and it is its hiddenness, its 'repression of its own operations', that enables it to present itself as common sense, as an objective, innocent reflection of the real" (Fiske 42). The higher in the hierarchy, the more 'hidden' and 'unnamed' it is and the more it presents itself as natural without alternative, once a discourse is named and identified, it becomes 'lower' as it marks 'other' points of view (Fiske 43). Therefore it is the aim of this analysis to uncover those textualities that invite the audience to make sense of this RTV show in a concurrent, relatively conflict free manner, which consequently naturalizes discourses of age and sexuality, and subsequently teenage sexuality. Naturalization is present within any form of

textual realism, as it “hides its discursive nature and presents itself as natural rather than cultural, that is, as an unmediated product of, or reflection of, an innocent reality” (Fiske 41).

This perspective differentiates how media texts' position in shaping larger discourses can be evaluated, as I have established that *16 and Pregnant* cannot *impose*, yet indeed delimit and shape potential meanings by textualities inviting the audience to promote or reject certain discourses. These potential meanings, then, can be inferred by the TV textualities in which *16 and Pregnant* represents teenage sexuality through teenage pregnancy and parenthood. In these terms, I will argue that *16 and Pregnant* is formulaic in its TV textuality and narrative structure, which could account for those critiques that accused the text of framing teenage pregnancy in an obscuring and reductionist perspective (Daniel 89, Guglielmo and Stewart 20), which is simplifying a highly complex socioeconomic and cultural process that spans over several emerging and fading dominant discourses on sexuality and age. This observation is also made by Martina Thomas who points towards the fact that the show's format leaves out a big portion of the teen mothers' lives when “support systems are not revealed; presentation and achievement of goals are largely absent; and acknowledgment of maturity in motherhood displayed by cast members' decisions is virtually nonexistent” (120). In a format like *16 and Pregnant*, the complexities of teenage parenthood are seemingly more than out of place, as they work against the very constructed 'realism' the show is striving towards: an evocative, intimate and personal tragedy of too-early parenthood which, while not overtly judged, has often been accused to 'misrepresent' teenage pregnancy and parenthood (Conan). This stands in direct opposition to the claims of the creator of the show, as well as a survey conducted by *The National Campaign*, have claimed *16 and Pregnant* has indeed helped in bringing down the numbers of teen pregnancy (**Tozzi**).

When attempting to make analytical sense of RTV's realist textuality, Christine Gledhill's useful discussion of Soap Opera, and her use of the distinction of the literary and often vaguely used term of 'realism' is helpful. Rather than employing assumptions of 'authenticity' and 'reality' which are either overly complex, vague or with little analytical merit, Gledhill relies on three concepts that prove helpful when discussing the relation of fictional text and reality: cultural verisimilitude, generic verisimilitude and realism (360). Realism refers to the recognition of a fictional story world as similar to our own, generic verisimilitude governs the often flexible rules of what can be considered as credible *within* a genre, while

cultural verisimilitude “refers to the norms, mores and common sense of the social world *outside* the fiction” (Gledhill 360). This distinction is vital to consider when analyzing an RTV show as

it suggests how and why *realism* is always a matter of contest. For the demand for realism won't go away, however problematic the notion. And while the concept of verisimilitude refers to normative perceptions of reality – what is generally accepted to be so – the demand for a 'new' realism from oppositional or emerging groups opens up the contest over the definition of the real and forces changes in the codes of verisimilitude. (Gledhill 360)

Gledhill is not the first to take note of the struggle over realism, as Fiske maintains that '*social categories*' are better understood as '*social formations*'; this is not to say that class, gender, age and sexuality do not have categorical functions, but due to the always ongoing struggle to maintain what demarcates those categories they should be understood as fragile and in need of constant maintenance rather than fixed constants that need to be shattered (Fiske, *Media* 66). In this thesis, the social formation most focused on is that of age, as it is also “an axis of power, a current of meaning with political effects”, denoting its unpredictability when placed within a time, place and other sociocultural circumstances which is exactly what makes it a 'terrain of struggle' (ibid.).

Additionally to this discursive struggle, Gledhill points out how “the tension between *realism* and *cultural* and *generic verisimilitude*” makes the involvement of media texts in the struggle over defining power about cultural constructions of 'the real' all the more visible, and a worthwhile place to examine how these struggles are framed (361). Along with Gledhill's sample analysis of soap opera's and melodrama's generic and cultural verisimilitude, RTV formats can be added to the list of TV genres that are “heavily invested in *cultural verisimilitude*” (ibid.). This tension between generic and cultural verisimilitude puts additional pressure on genre texts to be innovative, yet similar, by shifts in cultural values and attitudes towards certain social groups, which drives forward “the constant need for new story material and the need for an edge over competitors, make topicality, being up-to-date, controversy, all vital factors in the form's continuance” (ibid.). *16 and Pregnant*'s generic and cultural verisimilitude is placed within exactly that tension and hegemonic struggle over defining 'reality' – or 'honest truth' – of teenage pregnancy as a RTV genre text. As I will elaborate upon,

on the one hand, the show aims to authentically and pedagogically showcase pregnant teenage girls' experiences, a seemingly objective camera providing the audience with an intimate perspective, following in the footsteps of already established documentary and RTV genre conventions. On the other hand, the now familiar textuality of RTV – with its elements of surveillance and viewers eavesdropping into the most intimate and private moments of perfect strangers (Bagdasarov 299) – is giving way to a dramatization of what had been initially presented as 'real', unaltered, day to day experiences of pregnant teens. This instills structural textualities of myth and metonymy, as well as melodrama, which heightens *16 and Pregnant's* potential to evoke emotions in its audience.

Asking whether TV is reflecting or conveying 'real life' might seem like an analytical dead end, however, dismissing this train of thought could lead this analysis to precipitously

ignore the role of television as part of a larger network of ideological state apparatuses that inform and *mediate* the way we understand ourselves and others. Rather than condemning the representation of Jack [a character in *Dawson's Creek*] because it is less coherent and consistent than 'real-life' homosexual identities, it is useful to think about television as one of the many resources that help to define who we are. Thinking about the production of stories on TV can prompt us to start thinking about the broader networks of production in which our own 'stories', the building blocks of our identities, are implicated. (O'Brien and Szeman 183)

Indeed, additionally to taking *16 and Pregnant's* stake in its claim on the cultural verisimilitude of teenage pregnancy and sexuality serious, my analysis will “draw [...] attention to elements of drama and performances as having a purchase on reality in terms of what they *enact*”, namely that they “register the latent gendering of these debates around what constitutes the political [...] and] calls into view the well established arguments around the distinction between fact and fiction as inherently gendered fields” (Skeggs and Wood 24-25).

Gendered Genres: individualized and politicized ways of accessing the 'real'

According to Skeggs and Wood, what “counts as 'real' is still a gendered battlefield”, which is split between the rationality of sociopolitical arguments, and “personal, emotional and subjective [which] speak to an alternative 'truth' which relies on the melodramatic” (Skeggs and Wood 27). Acknowledging that this struggle over how to access the 'real' is gendered brings back the topic of how realism can be thought of as gendered as well, especially when it comes

to the already 'realistic' medium of television and its genres. This would mean that, for example, genres such as the news, documentaries and sports are qualified as masculine as they seem to capture “knowledge of the 'world out there'” (Fiske 219), while fictional genres, such as soap operas, are preferred by female audiences for their 'emotional realism', as opposed to masculine genre's 'empirical realism' (ibid.). What is remarkable in *16 and Pregnant* is that it seems to combine both masculine and feminine genres in its textualities.

It could be argued that *16 and Pregnant*'s main, aesthetic textualities that structure its episodes are clearly masculine: the mostly linear, formulaic structure of each episode, the omniscient camera, 'fly-on-the-wall', brings immediacy and authenticity of 'capturing' events while they unfold, further emphasizing its impression of authenticity through its low-definition footage and voice-over narration, a documentary convention lending further masculine credence to what is captured on film. When taking into account the surrounding political and public debate over teenage pregnancy as an 'epidemic', it is critical to acknowledge *16 and Pregnant*'s insistence on how obviously and rationally teenage pregnancy should be framed as a problem that exists in the real world, that it is something that needs solving when the show's creator claims it provides the audience with “candid glimpses” (Dinh) of the “the honest, unpleasant truth of teen pregnancy in America – the whole truth” (Dolgen).

At the same time, embedded within what Fiske would qualify as masculine genre conventions, *16 and Pregnant* adds feminine genre conventions, such as the voice-over narration being provided by the pregnant, teenage girls themselves – framing it, along with other textualities discussed later, similarly to an autobiography or diary – as well as its strong focus on teenage emotional lows over highs, the incredible pain of childbirth and the subsequent struggles of a teenage parent, which are all experiential access points to the 'reality' of teenage pregnancy and sexuality through 'emotional' rather than 'empirical realism'. As I will show in the rest of the textual analysis, *16 and Pregnant*'s emotionally juxtapositioned editing is what shapes its recognizable pattern through which it tells its stories, as well as signifying a shift Bill Nichols described as moving

away from a grasp upon the objective truth towards a subjective 'less real' emphasis upon sensation and performance. Here 'spectacles of particularity' run directly counter to any socio-political project, replacing the rational exploration of macro-economic issues, with emotive instances of the micro, the particular, the personal. (Skeggs and Wood 23)

This shift is all the more important when remarking that “the focus on domestic and banal observations of everyday life may instead be represented as an 'opening out' of political relations by making public the very fields that are considered private. As feminists have argued for a long time the private *is* public and of course *always* politicized” (Skeggs and Wood 27). While teenage pregnancy does not constitute a banality of everyday life, it is still relevant to *16 and Pregnant's* analysis to recognize how the very genre conventions of the show are already gendered, as well as displacing political and public discourses – such as age and sexuality – into personal, individualized realms. Even though there are now varied and differing formats within the RTV genre, *16 and Pregnant* is remarkable in showcasing deeply personal, intimate and private moments – such as birth and matters of childcare – “which is extending what we know about the use of melodrama as a moral device” (Skeggs and Wood 4). This, then, could be how *16 and Pregnant*, already through its genre conventions and aesthetics, could indeed be part of curbing teenage pregnancy rates: through representing teenage sexuality in realist, gendered textualities which, at the same time, employ melodramatic devices, the show creates a heightened sense of “moral panic” which “has real measurable effects in the form of individual behavior, social behavior, and governmental policy” (O'Brien and Szeman 69). These reactions to the perceived threat come to play an integral role in (retrospectively) defining its meanings” (ibid.). Moral panics centered around sexuality and the family were ever present in U. S. culture, with social conservative politics of the 20th century highlighting the “so-called collapse of the traditional nuclear family” (Fiske, *Media* 114). At the time these fears surfaced, lived family realities were already vastly different: “When most people live in conditions that differ from such a norm, social anxieties are bound to result” (Fiske, *Media* 115). This exemplifies how ideology has material effects, giving representations of teenage sexuality on American TV more weight than perhaps previously thought.

3.2. Narration: authority and continuity in *16 and Pregnant*

Narration: authority and autobiography

According to TV studies scholar Bignell, a certain sense of story, especially within

documentary style formats, has been essential when wanting to not just gain but guide one's audience through the TV text (222). There are a few signposts within *16 and Pregnant's* formula where the viewer is guided through what is essentially the teenage girl's story. The show's formulaic structure – starting from the narrated 'Hi, my name is...' introduction to the recreation and retelling of certain events that happened before the camera was there to capture them, to the ending 'confessional' scene where the teenage girl reflects over what has happened over the course of the episode – is certainly the principle, textual guide that organizes *16 and Pregnant*, making it the recognizable format that it is.

However, the one structural component that makes this an intimate, personal, almost autobiographical story is the fact that each teenage girl herself is narrating her own episode. Bignell notes that a “voice-over commentary can describe, explain or make an argument that has a sequence and a story-like flow” (222), which is what each and every episode features extensively. The pregnant teenage girls therefore occupy a dual role; they are the subject and focal point of the episode, and at the same time the assumed source of observational expert commentary (ibid.). This is relevant, because it presents the audience with another piece of *16 and Pregnant's* generic verisimilitude, where “not only the observation of the documentary subject [...] provides an impression of reality in documentary television but also the inclusion of supporting narration, testimony and expert commentary” (Bignell 222), which are all provided by mainly one and the same person: each pregnant teenage girl is at the center of one episode of *16 and Pregnant*.

Furthermore, the voice-over narration must be conceived as establishing the relationship between the teenaged-narrator and the assumed target audience of teenagers. On account of the pregnant teenage girls' special and unusual authoritative position as narrator, they find themselves as part of an unequally weighted relationship with the audience as well: the pregnant teenage girl as the expert, the audience as those receiving a lesson or a 'warning' within *16 and Pregnant's* cautionary tale, while, at the same time, both are still discursively situated as teenagers. This is a precarious position to inhabit at best, most importantly because the teenage participants gained their 'expert' authority by failing to successfully inhabit a teenage space that precluded *adult* sexuality, as well as heteronormative parenthood, both of which are markedly *adult*. Whether this position can be considered to empower *16 and Pregnant's* participants – to configure them as 'experts' on their failed adolescence and let them

tell their own story as a way of helping other teens to refrain from 'making the same mistakes' – cannot be answered clearly just yet, as other textualities and discourse levels that create *16 and Pregnant's* generic and cultural verisimilitude still need to be examined further.

However, this is arguably the most compelling textual element of *16 and Pregnant's* structure which point towards a special relational dynamic between narrator and audience: not the school, parents or official institutions are in the primary position of authority within *16 and Pregnant's* structure, but it is the teenage girls themselves who are addressing the audience. While this could be indeed interpreted as empowering, it rather marks a shift of how 'peer pressure' would appear to be operationalized as a way of extending control over teenage sexuality's possible meanings. This constitutes a remarkable shift of power in a history of sexuality where children and teenagers were under the sole authority of adults and what they deemed appropriate (Jackson 231). Instead of adult prohibition of teenage sexuality, this arguably constitutes the shift towards a “bottom-up self-governing: governmentality of sexuality” (Rivkin 895).

Governmentality, as a regulatory and motivational tool of the subject, is becoming increasingly unavoidable as the concept of *self-work* which has been transgressing “the worlds of the domestic and the occupational” (Skeggs and Wood 31). Still, it is important to note that however blurry the boundaries between public and private, personal and political, as well as domestic and occupational are becoming, “the politics of gender and class do not disappear as self-governance comes into effect, rather, they are re-enacted *through* modes of personalization and individualization” (Skeggs and Wood 31). This is especially applicable when talking about discourses on teenage sexuality, as the formation of one's identity has a “trajectory from youth to maturity” (Jackson 232), where the genre of autobiography was central to the journey of constructing a 'sense-of-self', which, conclusively, ended in growing up and maturing into adulthood (Jackson 240). This is important to note because, as I have established, TV realism relies on 'normality' and invited its audience to judge what falls within and outside the norm when asked to identify with on-screen characters. As I will argue in the next sections, TV's generic verisimilitude works, especially through narration and other textualities, to interpellate the viewer in the main subject position on offer, which is most often part of “the discourses of dominant ideology” (Bignell 218).

Voice-over narration: continuity and infantilization

The very first episode of *16 and Pregnant* is named after and centered around Maci, a typical teenage girl from Chattanooga, Tennessee. In a voice-over narration, she describes herself as overachieving and ambitious as the audience is presented a montage of various activities she engages in, from school work to going out with her friends. She gets good grades, plays softball, is on the cheer leading squad, even rides dirt bikes. All this information is shown, but also told in Maci's voice-over-narration which along with the introduction of 'Hey, my name is Maci!' creates not only the impression of Maci representing and telling her own story in her own words, but also casts everything the audience sees in *16 and Pregnant* within a very intimate light. Therefore, additionally to the textuality of the non-existent camera, the voice-over narration adds an additional layer of authenticity to everything the viewers are presented with – and, more importantly, *how* it is presented – not only because narration has been established as a factual device within documentary genre conventions. It is so convincing because the teenage girl herself tell her story, even addressing the viewers themselves at certain points – always at the beginning, as well as at the end reflecting upon the episode, with both of these textual elements comprising the two main pillars of *16 and Pregnant's* story structure. The most prevalent form of narration, however, is commenting on scenes the viewers have just seen, creating the impression that what the audience is shown on *16 and Pregnant* is not just 'authentic', but also consented to by the teenage girl narrating, while at the same time guiding the viewer's interpretation of the scenes as closely to the teenage narrator's experience as possible.

Another way how narration guides viewers through a story is by providing a sense of continuity. This certainly applies to *16 and Pregnant* which, often omitting weeks, sometimes months between two scenes, is done through montage segments in the style of doodle-like animations with a background that resembles a diary. Every single one of these segments – usually before and after commercial breaks – are accompanied by narration as well, and are often used to provide exposition or recreate certain scenes that the cameras were not around to capture.

The first function these segments appear to serve is to recreate those events that are relevant to the participant's story, yet could not be captured by the camera. For instance, in order to underline the unplanned nature of her pregnancy, Amber herself tells the audience she would have never guessed she would find herself in this situation. This narration is

accompanied by a cartoon-doodle montage that shows Amber before she got pregnant. Her cartoon self is a tomboy, scaring cheer leaders and being a 'rebel', which is represented by her cartoon-self swearing at other girls. She further tells the audience that she never wanted kids, either, and she was a party girl: “But that life is ancient history” (Amber in “Amber”, *16 and Pregnant*). Jointly with the fact that *16 and Pregnant* does not seem to focus on a special demographic – all teenaged girls are from across the United States, have different socioeconomic and ethnic backgrounds – this sort of retelling lends a new quality to 'unplanned' pregnancy: it could happen to *anyone*, not just Amber, the rebel tomboy, but also Maci, the overachieving cheerleader, or Ebony, the disciplined student and member of the ROTC (Reserve Officer Training Corp) in hopes of pursue a military career. This discourse of '*it-could-happen-to-you*' (Thomas 119-120) is based exactly on the vastly diverse group of teenage girls, which are then positioned within *16 and Pregnant*'s generic verisimilitude to metonymically represent all teenagers. Specifically because the episodes' formula does not focus on one specific 'kind' of teenage girl, the teenage girls of *16 and Pregnant* are able to be associated with all teenage girls, especially when they voice how they never expected to be '16 and pregnant' and therefore implicitly have figured themselves as having been part of '*it-could-happen-to-you*'.

Coupled with this a stigma still strongly associated with teenage pregnancy, which is perhaps unsurprisingly connected to what the teenagers' peers will think about them. While Farrah has experienced bullying to the point where she completed her high school credits at a local college (“Farrah”, *16 and Pregnant*), the audience sees Whitney's struggle with her peers recounted in a cartoon-montage scene where she tells the viewers the following:

When I found out I was pregnant, I was embarrassed and afraid of what people think about me, so I dropped out of high school. I hoped to get my G. E. D. and still go to college, but now I've been pregnant six months and barely leave the house. I even stopped hanging out with my friends because I don't want people to see me. (Whitney in “Whitney”, *16 and Pregnant*).

To interpret this fear of being judged by her peers as downright emotionally and socially crippling is not at all far fetched. Her narration is set to the cartoon-diary of Whitney at school and fellow students laughing and pointing at her, with speech bubbles of text popping up, saying 'She's pregnant!', 'Slut!', 'Whore!'. While delimiting these arguably strong emotions

within a textuality that is infantilizing, it is at the same time autobiographic as well, placing it once again on within the field of the personal and private. It is the reliving and recreation of a moment, which displaces the supposed 'problem' of teenage pregnancy and makes it a private, emotional and individual problem, completely omitting the political and cultural debates around teenage pregnancy.

A prime example of this are those segments that visualize the narrators' hopes and dreams, echoing the intimacy and privacy of a diary. This is how it is represented that Whitney is happy to have lost her virginity to her first boyfriend, Weston, and already dreams about a 'happily ever after' with him, complete with a big house and a big family. On the surface, the stylistic choice of a day-dreaming diary come to life to provide emotional depth might seem innocent enough, however, no textuality is neutral in its ideology. Fears, anxieties and hopes are made visible and are placed within autobiographic segments, framing the teenage girls' experiences as personal and private, and thus, also conceiving of them as private, personal problems that they have to deal with, or even have brought upon themselves.

It could be argued that an additional layer of the continuous narration in *16 and Pregnant* is the use of music in addition to participants narrating over scenes and montages. Music is indeed a powerful narrative device, established in not only TV but most forms of audiovisual media to evoke certain emotions in the viewer, or indeed limit which emotional response a scene is supposed to evoke from the viewer. Confrontational scenes between teenage couples or their parents are accompanied by a slower paced music, often contemporary soft or indie rock. While this kind of music is used to underline the gravity of the situation, such as when a reluctant Ebony finally confronts her fiancé Josh that she cannot handle studying and raising a baby all by herself without his help, music is also used to rouse rougher reactions, such as in the scene where Maci's baby is crying non-stop, which is then accompanied by a track of fast paced, loud rock music. While this clearly extradiegetic narrative device might be seen in conflict with *16 and Pregnant's* attempt at an authentic, RTV stylistic text, it could indeed be argued that music does help to tell the participant's story, or, at the very least, limits the text in the way it can be read by the viewer. Notably, the use of music in this instance constitutes a textual element that reinforces the text's offered subject position – that of the pregnant teenage girl – thus severely limiting the audience's freedom to interpret a scene in any other than its preferred way. These observations are especially relevant to make for *16 and*

Pregnant, as its genre of RTV offers less of a complex textuality and ways of representation rather than a realist text that strives to be convincingly immediate and intimate. Using music as a narrative device in such a genre marks another textual path through which *16 and Pregnant* achieves this.

One such example of limiting polysemy through music in *16 and Pregnant*'s realist textuality is the scene that shows Maci trying to teach her boyfriend Ryan how to change a diaper, only to fail horribly herself. While this might be seen as alarming – or indeed quite pathetic, yet reinforcing teenagers' infantilization and lack of self-responsibility – it is set to happy, upbeat rock music as the couple starts to laugh about their failed attempt to put diapers on their newborn baby. In this instance, there are several reading positions possible, however, the use of happy background music is encouraging the viewer to accept this as a charming display of struggling new parents. In this respect, and not only for this scene, it can be seen how music is used to delimit *16 and Pregnant*'s possible reading positions.

Finally, at the very end of every episode, *16 and Pregnant* goes into what could be called a 'confessional' scene. These are probably the most intimate scenes throughout the episodes, as they appear to be filmed by the teenage girls themselves, and are also the only time the teenage girls break the fourth wall and directly address the camera and their audience. Almost always connected or inter-cut with cartoon-diary segments, these confessional scenes also wrap up each episode with a monologue summarizing and reflecting upon what happened, as well as a hopeful, yet fearful look into an unclear future, leaving each episode more or less open ended. These segments are important to mention, because all the textual implications now seem to intensify: now the non-existent camera from before becomes an intimate video-diary. The teenage girls are alone in their rooms while appearing to film themselves, underlining the intimacy of what they have to say, making it appear all the more profound, seemingly spontaneous and unsolicited; a personal message to other teens, the audience. All of the confessionals function as not just a textual end to an episode, but as a last warning, a final reminder that, “nothing about being a teen mother is easy, and I know I have a lot to learn”, as Farrah tells her audience (“Farrah”, *16 and Pregnant*).

Therefore, the use of the cartoon-diary segments, together with narration to provide continuity, is where *16 and Pregnant* frames the teenage girls in an unmistakably teenage discursive space that is not only infantilizing, but also private. This has been noted by other

critics (Thomas 110, 120), however, the fact that these discursive dynamics already take place within the very textual level of those continuity segments is an analytical point overlooked by many criticizing the show. Still, that *16 and Pregnant* chose to establish continuity in this way is crucial, as it casts teenage sexuality and pregnancy in firmly teenage, *non* adult terms and visual aesthetics from the very beginning, which is then the textual background which complicates and causes discourses to clash even more when teenage pregnancy and parenthood are causing discontinuities in discursive divide of adolescence and adulthood. How this is further solidified by the textuality of *16 and Pregnant's* point-of-view will be discussed in the next section.

3.3. Point-of-View (POV) – the gendered, teenage perspective

The main perspective *16 and Pregnant* provides is perhaps obvious, however, also the most powerful textuality at work in this format, as “it is the form that they [the meanings] are given that produces the point of view from which we look at them, and thus the sense we make of them, and, paradoxically, the sense they make of us” (Fiske 23). In film analysis – and subsequently applicable to every audio-visual medium – POV denotes which perspective the camera's angles use to frame its shots which are never neutral. The 'fly-on-the-wall' camera positions the audience in a position of omniscience, as well as being directly addressed by participants, all of which put the viewer in different relationship to the text and how they are addressed.

However, in the case of *16 and Pregnant*, certain other textualities that are not necessarily highly constructed shots and angles need to be acknowledged, as RTV as a genre does not specifically rely on them as much as they do rely on capturing emotionally evocative content (Skeggs and Wood 27, 40). In turn, the understanding of POV needs to be extended, namely, to also consider what is shown and is not shown additionally to certain camera angles that denote a specific perspective over others. These elements, as well as the textual aspects I have discussed above, will come together and work at limiting possible meanings, as well offering the viewer the pregnant teenage girls' subject position above all others, therefore imploring the audience to identify with the main subject position on offer.

In extending what POV can mean when creating generic verisimilitude in an RTV show, it is helpful to keep in mind that *16 and Pregnant* often leaves weeks or months in between two scenes, it is not surprising that the majority of *what* the audience is shown are conflicts and fights. Instead of recreating a daily routine of a teenage mother, episodes linger on those moments that create friction and ultimately fall in line with RTV's generic verisimilitude of 'emotion as truth' (Fiske 219, Skeggs and Wood 27) when the viewers see a teenage father telling his girlfriend her mother called him an 'inbred piece of shit' in the middle of a heated fight ("Amber", *16 and Pregnant*), or when Whitney 'overhears' – in a clearly staged, rather than candid sequence of scenes – her mother and grandmother talking about her and her boyfriend's lack of responsibility, causing her to burst into tears which are captured in a CU shot ("Whitney", *16 and Pregnant*).

The overwhelming majority of scenes between the teenage couples are centered around the teenage girls' struggling to take care of the newborn, as well as finish high school. From relationship problems to organizing daycare and simply completing household chores, the scenes shown excessively feature how seemingly all of the responsibility is expected and often shouldered by the teenage mother alone. While Ebony is taking care of the baby and cooking, the camera cuts to her fiancé Josh who is sleeping in the living room on the floor, while she takes care of the baby and takes out the trash after he refuses to. In only one instance – Weston, Whitney's boyfriend – taking care of the baby is mostly done by the teenage father, without leading up to an argument over whose turn it is to take care of the baby. This is shown in a montage, however, and not given much attention in favor or focusing on the couple's more pressing financial and housing issues, as well as on Whitney's guilt over not being able to contribute much. Still highlighting – through both narration and POV – the teenage mother's struggle when the teenage father is not only *not* absent, but the primary care taker, further encourages the audience to not just take up the teenage girl's subject position when engaging with the show, but also to accept her struggle to be a 'proper' mother as unproblematic and obvious.

Disapproval of their peers and parents are featured in every episode, especially peers at school seem to be an obstacle impossible to overcome and rather to avoid, as in Farrah's and Amber's case, who go to great lengths to avoid school and same-aged peers, either by staying home or transferring to college based high school classes. Maci and Ebony often face the

disapproving looks at school, yet while Maci is only worried that she will distract the 'other kids with her pregnant belly', Ebony actually attends a self-help group that is organized by the high school, where teenage mothers meet others to discuss their experiences. Ebony narrates “at school, some kids are excited about my pregnancy, but other kids just aren't as cool with it”. A male class mate tells about his own sister and how her early pregnancy ruined her life, prompting Ebony to explain that the baby wasn't planned but that she wants to have it. This is then followed with a shot of another male class mate telling the group directly that “If girls have no respect for themselves...I'm not saying you have no respect for yourself if you're having sex, but, you know, just keep your legs closed”. While this teenage mother group was supposed to guide Ebony through her struggles, she admits that afterward she was 'freaked out' even more than before.

Lastly, the pain of giving birth is given great attention within the POV of *16 and Pregnant*. Here, the fact that the viewers, as perfect strangers, can witness such a private, vulnerable moment of someone they have never personally met, or even seen outside of how *16 and Pregnant* introduces them, is remarkable. Whether the viewers *want* to be witnessing the birth is never addressed, which is telling when considering from which angle the audience sees the birth. The camera takes position *behind* the teenage girl about to give birth, the shot framed by her spread open legs with a doctor in between them, often inter-cut with another camera holding a steady close up of her pained face in an extreme close up, alienating the viewer to the point of discomfort (Fiske 32). The viewers are not just witnessing the birth, but instead, the text's POV invites them to take the teenage girl's position. This is achieved mainly through the way the shot is angled and framed by the camera: the viewers actually witnesses the moment of birth without any visible editing, taking up as closely the point of view of the teenage girl in labor as possible, while at the same time also witnessing her pain on her grimacing face. This enables the audience to see what she sees, without any 'explicit' body parts being shown, while at the same time being able to witness the very first moment of the baby's life. The viewers hear the baby's first cry, and is wrapped in a towel to cover the blood and bodily fluids and given straight into its mother's arms. These birth scenes might take up a considerably small amount of time when compared to the rest of the show's running time, however, they are all the more relevant to my analysis, as this is the only time in the text where the camera's position and angles actually shifts out of its 'fly-on-the-wall' position in order to directly show the teenage

girl's point of view.

What is *not* shown in *16 and Pregnant*, or at least less focused on, is the parents' perspective. Within entire episodes, they are supporting characters at best, and when the parents' perspective *is* given some attention, it is always in dispute with the primarily teenage POV, which then finally leads up to a conflict between the parent and teenage daughter (Thomas 110). Farrah's and Catelynn's episodes were more or less hinging upon the conflicts with their mothers (Thomas 120) – Farrah's father was barely shown in the episode – Ebony's fiancé Josh fled from home when his arguments with his strict mother became overwhelming, and Amber's family was only shown to say that they are glad she is not married to her boyfriend, or to decide who's family is to blame for Amber's pregnancy. To focus on these 'chaotic family dynamics' (Dinh) – through the POV of the teenage girl, embedded within the RTV verisimilitude, and with the exclusion of the parents' perspective – is creating a causal connection between dysfunctional relationships and teenage pregnancy, compelling the audience to recognize these dynamics as yet another *obvious* consequence of teenage pregnancy (Bignell 219).

The teenage father's perspective is marginalized as well (Beggs Weber and Schatz 126), and only profoundly focused on if there is a conflict present with either the teenage girl or her family. As I have mentioned above, even when the teenage father is present and willing to take over a share of the parenting chores – or even most of them, his efforts are only glossed over, and strictly viewed from the teenage girl's point of view. In Whitney's episode, her boyfriend Weston not only takes care of their newborn, but also takes on household chores and taking care of an exhausted a recovering Whitney, who narrates how 'lucky' she was to have Weston around to help out, is further casting parenting and domestic duties as expected from the mothers, and exceptional when taken on by fathers.

In fact, the only glimpse into the struggles of being a teenage father the audience is provided with is when Josh finally voices his fears when confronted by Ebony over his absences in school, causing him to come close to not graduating:

I'm 18 years old, you're 17 years old, we got a baby. I've been working my ass off just to graduate and then I gotta worry about enlisting into the air force and I'm not gonna be able to see you guys that much at all. Sacrifices. (Josh, in Episode, “*Ebony*”)

This is the most attention the teenage fathers' perspective was given within the entire first season. The continuous absence of the teenage father, as well as *16 and Pregnant* taking up his point of view invites the viewers to feel sympathy for Ebony's struggle more so than Josh's. Thus, through the show's narrow focus on the teenage girl – through narration, point of view, as well as through what is and is not shown – *16 and Pregnant* constructs pregnancy and child rearing as a female task, even pictured as a burden, but a burden that is *expected* to be taken on by the mother, even when conflicts over shared household and parenthood duties arise. In this sense, the textual structuring through a specific *point-of-view* has *16 and Pregnant* reaffirm gendered discourses on family and child rearing.

In connection to this stands the myth of the 'family' which, most importantly, is not necessarily mythical because of *what* it represents – father, mother, child – rather, it is mythical because it is “regulated and conditioned by social organisations and language structure” (Thwaites 137). The family is seen, at the same time, as an institution reaching beyond the relationships of parents and their children, and as a state “conceived to be one of the most natural, seemingly universal bonds in existence” (ibid.). How teenage parenthood would disrupt this natural, yet fragile institution of the family (Weeks 235) is something I will discuss later on.

More importantly, having discussed matters of POV, as well as narration, turning to the question of how the audience is addressed through these textualities, and consequently implored to take on the subject position of the teenage girls in *16 and Pregnant*, Skeggs and Wood claim that

it is important to understand just how socio-political trends in western societies have been re-organized around what Charles Taylor (1989, 1991) and Marilyn Strathern (1992) define as 'compulsory individuality', where people have to perform their own social worth to others rather than looking to 'higher' authorities such as religion and the state to provide legitimation for their lives. (28)

As I have previously established, these matters of identity formation are central to the conception of adolescence and 'teenagerness' (Baxter iii), as teenagers occupy an in-between space where they are situated as 'pre-individuals' which, as Baxter maintains, is resulting in “teenagers [being] consistently represented as preoccupied by uncontrollable emotions and hormones” (Baxter 126). Together with the shift towards 'informal' rather than 'institutionalized' forms of authorities, it follows then, that “not only do teens learn to define themselves in

relation to others, but they are *expected* to change and explore various identity options” (Baxter 126-127). This makes *16 and Pregnant's* POV in itself unstable, as well as the primary “source of anxiety for adult America, because within it traditional family values have been most keenly tested and contested” (Fiske, *Media* 115). Therefore, it is important to reiterate when analyzing the function of *16 and Pregnant's* teenage, feminine POV when it is situated within sexuality and the family.

In reference to the formulations of Beck and Giddens and what has come to be called the 'individualization thesis', Skeggs and Wood claim that “‘compulsory individuality’ has partly enabled the explosion and relative success of reality television. This is not to suggest that questions of social structure are not relevant, but that they are *re-invested* through discourses of selfhood and self-responsibility” (28). Placing already 'pre-adult', 'in-between', 'unfinished' teenage identities (Baxter 127) in a position of providing the main POV and narration – within a genre that not only relies, but grew to a world-wide successful TV format by focusing on individuality and self-work – can be argued to be precarious rather than empowering.

Consequently, it is my contention that, rather than constituting a new, emergent discourse of empowerment where teenage parenthood would challenge current hegemonic discourses of heteronormative, *adult* sexuality and parenthood, the audience encounters and is asked to inhabit teenagers' consent to their own teenage discursiveness. These struggles, from the teenage girls' perspective, are not shown to be questioned or subverted, but rather constitute the rational and 'realist' consequences of teenage pregnancy, which the teenage audience is encouraged to accept and identify with. This, then, serves to reiterate and validate the ideological, commonsensical obviousness that teenagers are *supposed to be* helpless when taking on markedly *adult* discursive spaces of sexuality and parenthood (Fiske 25).

The fact that the marginal teenage voice becomes the 'expert' voice to metonymically stand for all teenagers is remarkable (O'Brien and Szeman 71), yet does not change that the marginal voice *agrees* with its struggles. Rather than empowering, *16 and Pregnant's* POV serves to disempower the teenage girls' voices, as they themselves are shown to admit defeat, talk about pain and reiterate how they were not prepared, and remain helpless. That these dominant discourses of *adult*, heteronormative sexuality and parenthood are reiterated from an authentic, 'realist', teenage POV is all the more powerful when considering the naturalization of age that these discourses hinge upon. This is an analytical point I will take up again when

talking about the relational dynamics of the teenage narrator and the teenage audience. There, I will further explore how, together with narration and POV, the teenage girls as well as their teenage viewers are implored to inhabit a teenage subject position, and how this position is seemingly stemming from the “reflection of [their] own desires and wants, in which [they] can already and effortlessly recognize [themselves]” (Thwaites 169).

3.4. Compressing time: motivated editing and emotional realism

One of the perhaps biggest conventions in TV text that are established to create a sense of generic verisimilitude is motivated editing, which above all “tries to make the work of the editor and director as invisible as possible”, as well as being responsible for the classic 'omniscient' camera style prevalent in most Hollywood and modern Film productions (Fiske 26). Further, the

conventions of classic editing constitute a particular mode of address to the spectator. In accepting a certain kind of verisimilitude in the spatial and temporal organisation of the film narrative the spectator becomes witness to a complete world, a world which seems even to exceed the bounds of the film frame. In looking at the face of characters close-up, and in identifying with characters in the text through taking on their implied point of view, the spectator identifies with the fictional world and its inhabitants, and so is drawn into the narration itself. (Cook 41)

Therefore, editing is highly relevant when considering the textual level of representation and media discourse, as well as a textuality which put the medium into the contradictory position between capturing 'reality' and fictional text (Cook 219). Editing, arranging shots in a certain way, is what makes it the primary narrative device for its ability to influence *how* those images on film will eventually be presented (Cook 219).

That this would also apply to a RTV format such as *16 and Pregnant* might appear puzzling at first, however, far exceeds the general audience consensus that contemporary RTV has very little 'real', but rather scripted content. As putting a value judgment on such a complicated category as 'reality' – and discussing whether these spontaneous, unscripted scenarios have more value than scripted ones, and whether it makes for equally compelling and influential media representations of certain groups and discourses – it should be recognized that

those textual features can very well construct a sense of authenticity and 'reality' in a TV format. This shifts the importance away from the 'authenticity' of a certain kind of generic verisimilitude, paying more attention to the textual ways in which these textualities represent a certain 'complete world'.

Firstly, considering the amount of time that the camera crew might actually spend following the teenage girls compared to the show's running length of 45 minutes, it needs to be assumed that post-production editing and filtering through the gathered material is a considerable portion of producing an episode. This process, then, necessarily compresses months into minutes which directly translates into a certain events happening very closely to one another within a single episode of *16 and Pregnant*, which is accomplished in specific sets of ways. In this respect, motivated or manipulative editing matters, because “*how* the events are compressed can alter the meaning of a scene, twist a person's apparent attitude, and alter 'reality' to the point that it's barely recognizable to those who were present for the actual events” (“Main/Manipulative Editing - Television Tropes & Idioms”). Within the TV text, however, it also creates the “impression that the edits are always required or motivated by the events in the 'reality' that the camera is recording [and] never the result of the desire to tell a story in a particular way. This produces the effect of seamlessness, of a continuous flow, with no manufactured joins or edges” (Fiske 27). As much as RTV – or TV in general – *appears* to be oozing with 'realism', it is simply an assemblage of established, familiar textual conventions that invite the impression of 'realism' through generic verisimilitude, a certain kind of realism already made incredibly familiar through TV as a medium.

While some established ways of motivated editing are missing in *16 and Pregnant* – shot/reverse shot, or match-on-action editing to establish continuity (Pierson), for example, simply because it is not a part of the show's generic vocabulary – the show still hints towards or utilizes several others, all of which are working to create a seamlessly edited text that necessarily must omit the majority of what cameras have captured. This one aspect of motivated editing – the compression of time – at once establishes a seamlessness within *16 and Pregnant*, while at the same time – and perhaps unavoidably, even – creates a sense of melodrama that is embedded within the text's overwhelmingly generic verisimilitude, thus imbuing conflict scenes and common plot lines of conflict with emotional evocation which translates into authenticity and immediacy (“Main/RTV - Television Tropes & Idioms”, Skeggs

and Wood 40-41). All these textual devices provide continuity and flow within *16 and Pregnant*, although as I will show, since RTV's generic verisimilitude rests upon emotional realism, the teenage girls themselves are providing the overarching continuity of the show's 'emotion as truth' (Fiske 219, Skeggs and Wood 27).

Compressed time is perhaps the biggest instance of *16 and Pregnant*'s motivated editing, as far as shaping what the viewer is shown or not shown. Together with compressed time through motivated editing, other forms of motivated editing are also utilized, such as missing context and cherry picking scenes and quotes, which would result in showing only a specific portion of a relationship, while leaving out the majority of that relationship's day-to-day make-up as well as pre-show history ("Main/Manipulative Editing - Television Tropes & Idioms"). This arguably leads to the seemingly higher number of conflicts compared to possible 'everyday-routine' content, when relationships of over six months or longer are summarized within an episode's 45 minutes. Another effect of compressed time through editing is that those conflicts, without doubting their gravity or authenticity, tend to appear as a snap reaction on the participants' part, when often the build up or participants' reasons for their reaction are left out of the scenes through 'casual deletion' ("Main/Manipulative Editing - Television Tropes & Idioms"). Once again, this constitutes a way of compressing time, only this time the conflict is exaggerated by editing out those portions of material that would show the build up to a conflict, thus making arguments often seem rash and spontaneous ("Main/Manipulative Editing - Television Tropes & Idioms").

This denial of context through the compression of time is what exaggerates the conflicts and inflates from arguments into potentially devastating fights. One such example stems from Farrah's episode. Even though her relationship with her mother is complex and seemingly difficult judging from their terse interaction on the show, the audience witnesses a tipping point when Farrah's mother changes her mind and agrees to get her a car so she could be more mobile and take care of her baby. On the drive to the dealership, seemingly within seconds, the hopeful mood is shifting back into conflict when an argument ensues over which car to buy. Rather than reaching a compromise, the scene ends with Farrah calling her grandparents as she gets out of her mothers car and waits to be picked up. The spontaneity and unusual timing of this conflict may well stem from scenes that have simply been cut, thus denying the viewer more context leading up to the conflict, creating the illusion of a heated fight that erupted within mere

moments.

Lastly, apart from compressed time, elicitation or 'pointed questions' are common since the early days of RTV – the iconic Big Brother RTV format comes to mind. This is an invisible, yet vastly shaping textuality of RTV, as all of the text's aesthetic and narrative devices work toward an authentic spontaneity, making the camera itself and its limited, framed shots so invisible that everything appears to be unsolicited, even when a staple tool of RTV is an interviewer asking specific questions in order to elicit specific responses (“Main/Manipulative Editing - Television Tropes & Idioms”). Although this point is based on established RTV conventions and not on any production notes of *16 and Pregnant*, it is important to consider as pointed questions would put into context how a lot of 'confessions' or voice-over narrations seem to resemble one another very closely, down to a pattern of specific phrases and themes – which I will discuss in more detail further in the analysis – that are repeated within the narratives that *16 and Pregnant* attempts to craft. This would imply, then, that those particular and repeated segments have either been scripted beforehand or elicited in a similar manner each time, while at the same time still attempting to imbue them with authenticity and emotional intimacy coming from the teenage narrator. This, then, necessarily points toward recognizing how a certain structure and genre pattern is established which reaches beyond the individual episodes. In recognizing this overarching continuity structure within *16 and Pregnant* might result in dislocating its constructed authenticity for an overall 'message' that remains the same, even when the episodes and their textualities urge the audience to recognize their individuality.

Even though I must concede that Farrah's episode stands out due to it containing a remarkable number of conflicts between her and her mother, this is not the only example of *16 and Pregnant*'s motivated editing. As I have established, by sheer necessity of compressing time, the scenes the audience is shown within an episode's 45 minutes are most likely 'cherry picked' and edited in such a way that they relate to each other through a certain sense of emotional tension, which is achieved by juxtaposing apprehension and anxiety with hope and happiness. How this is done, and on which discourses those 'cherry picked' scenes rely will be discussed in the next section of the chapter.

3.5. Emotional narratives: the organizing juxtaposition of hope and fear

As editing is *the* cinematic and televisual code that shapes a TV text (Cook 40), my analysis will take a closer look at the ways how the majority of scenes in *16 and Pregnant* are arranged, specifically looking at the each episode's timeline, and the juxtaposition of emotionally evocative scenes, which are hopeful and happy as well as filled with anxiety and apprehension. While I have discussed the textual implications of compressing time through motivated editing above, it is also relevant to remark that the point in time and time span at which *16 and Pregnant* is filmed as far from 'neutral', as any other textuality I have analyzed so far. The fact that each episode starts to follow the teenage girls when they are usually almost at the end of their pregnancy is telling in itself. At the same time, it establishes the sort of story arc that *16 and Pregnant* intends to present, namely all of the tumultuous *changes* that will happen to a teenage girl within the struggle of raising her newborn. That tangible representations of teenage sexuality or discussions of birth control are not just dismissed but outright excluded under this specific time arc in favor of focusing on this uniquely turbulent, liminal phase of adolescence (Baxter 126) the teenage participants find themselves in, is one of the very first textual hints on the TV show's preferred reading.

Consequently, *16 and Pregnant's* textuality, as well as representations of teenage sexuality, focus not on first loves, boyfriends, dating, sexual education and sexual health, but rather on the inconceivable pain of childbirth, the difficulties of taking care of newborns, as well as the struggle of maintaining relationships to partners and parents, finishing high school and the emotional toll and social stigma teenage parents – although only the teenage girls' POV is utilized – will inevitably have to bear. As I intend to show, this points towards the fact that, rather than simply documenting and lending a pregnant teenager's story a voice, *16 and Pregnant's* very timeline is constructed around emotionally unstable, yet intense scenes that afford the show's representations their emotionally evocative tone that is permeating the first season.

Typically, *16 and Pregnant* enters participants' lives between the 32nd and 35th week of pregnancy, and then continue to capture the next few months, along with the first few months of the newborn's life. This implies that a time span of more than six months is condensed into a 45 minute episode. Arguably, this very timeline is what *16 and Pregnant's* formula hinges upon –

this liminal phase in pregnant teenagers' lives – as the show only starts when they are in the last stages of pregnancy, and then only continues a few months into pregnancy, which, critics have argued, are the toughest ones regardless of parenting experience (Friedman 76). Therefore, the choice of this very timeline – a time of abrupt change and exhausting chores which are trying on any parent, even outside the close scrutiny of the TV frame – the audience sees the teenage girls must be considered as anything but 'neutral' or happenstance. Therefore, *16 and Pregnant* is primarily about emotional evocation.

The choice of this particular time span has become known as 'worst-side' shooting within the RTV genre ("Main/Manipulative Editing - Television Tropes & Idioms"), where strenuous situations are captured under exhausting and time-constrained production schedules. With this in mind, 'worst-side-shooting' would fulfill a clear purpose within the representations of teenage sexuality *16 and Pregnant* offers its audience. Indeed, this is adding more contextual depth to the concept of compressed time when considering how the production circumstances eventually influences the TV text's representations. This further complicates analyzing what the audience is presented with as *real* within the textualities of generic and cultural verisimilitude.

Juxtaposition of happiness and anxiety

As I have argued above, the main formulaic 'plot' of *16 and Pregnant* is constructed by compiling cherry-picked scenes from these approximately six months and arranging them in a certain way. Due to a high density of scenes showing either particularly happy or conflicting situations, the preeminent pattern of editing is contrastive (Bignell 222), as particularly happy and hopeful scenes are followed by a scene where the mood completely shifts into anxiety and apprehension. The resulting representation of young parenthood is oscillating between naïve hopefulness and struggling in the face of the 'harsh truth' of teenage parenthood at the most favorable of times is what arguably maintains teenage sexuality and parenthood as outside of hegemonic heteronormativity, which, as I have established, is firmly embedded within discourses on age and the family. The scenes of birth constitute reoccurring moments of happiness in each of the episodes, even when the teenage girls do not have a partner, as in Farrah's case, or have made the decision to place the baby for adoption, as Catelynn and Tyler have chosen. In each case, birth is still presented as 'the happiest moment' where the teenage mother is given her baby to hold, which is arguably a first juxtaposition to the scenes before,

which were filled with ineffable pain. The happiness over a successful birth of a healthy baby, however, is often quickly juxtaposed with either change – often for the worse – or conflict scenes between either the teenage couple or the teens' parents.

In Amber's episode, the viewers see her family surrounding her during birth, emotions of awe and happiness hanging in the air as they try to support her from a close distance. Once the baby has arrived, that tension is seemingly gone, and the audience sees a close-up of Gary, her boyfriend, who is happy and joking “Does she come with any instructions?” (Gary in “Amber”, *16 and Pregnant*). However, the happiness does not last long. Suddenly, a quick cut, now showing the messy apartment, providing a stark contrast to the blissful scene from before, while at the same time omitting weeks of the couple in their apartment that were spent taking care of their newborn. After shots of the mess in the apartment, fights are quick to follow where they both complain about division of household chores, as well as taking care of the baby. Gary, who works full time, feels unappreciated as he claims he runs the household on top of feeding the baby, which is, for the largest part, omitted from the scenes the viewers are shown.

Maci's episode features a similar juxtaposition, where, even before birth, she was struggling with her boyfriend Ryan's apathetic attitude towards her pregnancy. He was hardly interested in her progress or even how giving birth is going to work. This is emphasized in a scene that focuses on his cluelessness when Maci's doctor confronted him with the labor process and dilation. On the day of birth, Ryan holding his baby for the first time is also his first time ever holding a baby, which is repeatedly emphasized by Maci and his parents, highlighting his disinterest in baby care. However, this moment appears to be the first time he is ever confronted with him becoming a teenage parent. Watching Ryan, Maci is happy and narrates that “things haven't been this good since before I got pregnant. I only hope it lasts” (“Maci”, *16 and Pregnant*). As is perhaps predictable due to the show's emotionally juxtapositioned editing, they do not last and only escalate when Maci attempts to balance going to college, work, as well as taking care of the baby almost all by herself. Similarly, Ebony's birth scene is wrapped up with her narrating: “Holding her, Josh looks like a dad already. I hope he starts acting like one too” (“Ebony”, *16 and Pregnant*), already setting the mood of disappointment and conflict for the rest of her episode.

Similarly, Ebony faces further ups and downs, which only seem to be exaggerated by the contrastive editing within her episode. At the very beginning of the episode, Ebony and Josh

have conversations in their respective homes, which are inter-cut at precisely those moments where Ebony's naïve hopefulness over Josh being a responsible partner clash with the scenes of Josh being flummoxed into silence by his mother who is demanding to know how this unplanned pregnancy could have happened. Ebony's episode continues to gravitate towards highlighting Josh's childish and irresponsible behavior which is only heightened when it becomes clear that he will have to become the sole breadwinner of their new family. At the same time contrasting it with Ebony 'growing up' and taking over multiple responsibilities, even though her grades, and even her dream career in the Air-Force, suffer greatly, causing her to eventually drop out of high school. The only unmistakably happy scene for both is prom night, where they are happily dancing and kissing, prompting Ebony to narrate that “I could stay like this forever. My fantasy all hinges on one thing: Josh graduating. But the next day, reality set in” (“Ebony”, *16 and Pregnant*). It impossible to tell whether time was omitted between those two scenes, however, seemingly the next day after the prom Josh's many absences – 228 exactly – are uncovered and causes a fight with his parents. In this instance, the happy scene is not just simply juxtaposed with one in a completely opposite mood, rather, one flows directly into the other, seemingly implying not just continuity, but that happiness is always fleeting when faced with the struggles of 'too-early parenthood'.

By juxtaposing short-lived happiness and teenage naïvety with scenes of struggles and failures, *16 and Pregnant's* contrastive editing does not simply question their readiness (Baxter 82), rather, it *shows* the audience that teenage parents are definitely *not* ready for parenting, and thus not ready for normative, adult sexuality including its reproductive consequences. Framing this through the teenage, gendered POV implies the cause of this helplessness their inherent immaturity due to their too-young age. Similarly to teenage drama, as Baxter has discussed in her thesis, this “is also an incredibly gendered approach, focusing almost exclusively on female sexuality and placing male teenage sexuality in the background, as a common and far less risky occurrence”, whereas female sexuality is always framed in terms of (mostly negative) consequences (ibid.). Framing female teenage sexuality in terms of risk and consequence is a simultaneity to the fact that teenagers are “*expected* to change and explore various identity options. In a sense, maintaining unwavering relationships lies outside of the 'teen norm' (Baxter 126-127), which renders the relationship struggles *16 and Pregnant* represents as doubly counter-hegemonic. Further, when considering that the hegemony of heteronormativity includes

the idea of the heterosexual imaginary – “the belief that, to achieve a sense of well-being in life, one must be involved in a heterosexual romantic relationship” (McClanahan 142) – then seeing how teenage relationships consistently struggle and very often fail does not necessarily subvert the dominant validity of the heterosexual imaginary. As these failures are textually framed by a gendered, teenage POV – urging the audience through narration and emotional realism to accept the credibility of the struggles shown – and since teenage relationships are *expected* to fail, their failure reiterates and further naturalizes their inherent inability to inhabit the markedly adult, discursive space of heteronormative sexuality and parenthood due to their age. As Freedman notes, the “dissonance between the expected routines of care free adolescence and the emergent realities of parenthood is thus shown as an inevitable recipe for disappointment and sadness” (68).

This overlaps with my analysis as, additionally to other textualities I have discussed, *16 and Pregnant's* use of contrastive editing falls within the generic verisimilitude of TV drama and melodrama (Bignell 222). On top of this formulaic juxtaposition of happiness and helpless apprehension, the repetition of the formula in each episode works to normalize and naturalize this contrastive pattern of naïve hopefulness, struggle and failure, regardless of how different the teenage girl or how individualistic her episode might appear on the content level, making the struggles and failures of teenage pregnancy and parenthood appear to be impossible to overcome. Just how multidiscursive the episodes of *16 and Pregnant* are constructed on their textual level is also observed by Tropp who notes that the “program walks a fine line between normalizing teen pregnancy and illustrating the problems with it. Each episode ends with a morality tale that the girls realize the mistake they made” (146).

As I have shown in this chapter, those textualities that contribute to *16 and Pregnant's* generic verisimilitude – the camera's fly-on-the-wall position, conveying a sense of 'unmediated reality', implies a dominant viewer position that is omniscient and distances the viewer at the same time. This position of the viewer, together with such 'invisible' textualities as asking direct questions, omitting context and the compression of time, worst side shooting, helps *16 and Pregnant's* structure to present a unified, apparently seamless and harmonic piece of television that shows no disruptions, when, in actuality, the majority of what happened during the teenage participants' lives has been omitted, while the rest has been compressed and edited into a text that follows a specific, emotionally driven time line.

Additionally, through the use of narration, POV, cartoon-diary segments, as well as the juxtaposition of happiness and apprehension in contrastive editing, the textualities of *16 and Pregnant* come together to not only represent teenage sexuality – and in this case, pregnancy – as an emotionally turbulent time of *disruptive* change that is frightening, should be considered a problem that can be prevented, as well as a struggle that will ultimately end in failure.

These analytical points are especially relevant, as these are the textualities that delineate *16 and Pregnant's* representations of teenage sexuality and parenthood, and at the same time demarcate a specific subject position which the audience is compelled to inhabit when engaging with this text. Remarkably, the only subject position on offer is that of the pregnant teenage girl, due to the strict focus onto her experiences, camera angles that narrow these experiences down to her POV, while additionally supplementing voice-over narration by her, ending all episodes with a confessional scene which is also strictly focused on the pregnant teenage girl's experience and struggle. While this could be interpreted as a new found focus on a group previously unheard, it needs to be mentioned that the sole focus onto the teenage girl could be criticized as making teenage pregnancy, and dealing with teenage sexuality's heteronormative consequences, a purely gendered, female issue.

All of these textualities I have discussed effectively isolate the topic of teenage pregnancy – and the implied, yet the tacit 'too-soon' sexual activity that brought it about – and make it a deeply personal, individual and gendered problem. The emotionally juxtapositioned, contrastive editing is the primary textuality when creating “melodramatic suffering” which result in the reduction of teenage “everyday life into individualized emotion thereby occluding the workings of broader social and historical structure” (Skeggs and Wood 27). At the same time, the insistent offer to the audience to assume the teenage girl's subject position spreads the fear and anxiety of the consequences the mistake of teenage pregnancy causes onto the viewership with the message of '*it-could-happen-to-you*' (McClanahan 157). This is a salient point to make because it exposes how *16 and Pregnant's* textuality, one that is distinctly and consistently aiming for constructing authenticity, 'in-the-moment' aesthetics, as well as a narrative that is as intimate and autobiographical as a personal diary – subverts its own potentially “radical content” (Fiske 38) through the familiar form of RTV. As I have argued, the text's formal structure is what perhaps even allows for a breaking of silence on the topic of teenage sexuality and pregnancy, however, at the same time works to normalize its potentially

counter-hegemonic content that is firmly situated outside of heteronormative bounds of the family.

Furthermore, Thomas notes that this normalization of the representations of teenage pregnancy in *16 and Pregnant* shows a stark contrast between happiness and conflicts with either parents or partners which works to place these representations of 'too-early parenthood' outside of normative and socially acceptable heteronormativity (109). While they may want to be independent, through *16 and Pregnant's* emotionally juxtaposition editing, “these teen mothers are constantly infantilized and reminded that they do not and can never fit the heteronormative ideal” (Thomas 110) Thomas calls this a 'pattern of anxiety and reassurance' through expert advice (119) – what I have identified as permeating *16 and Pregnant's* very textuality and editing – is used to evoke that powerful feeling of fear and anxiety as well.

That this anxiety is firmly entrenched in *16 and Pregnant's* textuality is clear when Thomas further notes how the continuity editing through the use of the cartoon-diary segment

further pathologizes the 'challenges of motherhood' for these cast members. Viewers understand the difficulties but learn that these issues are oftentimes self-imposed and made worse through the decisions of cast members. It serves as a warning to viewers that they too can end up in these problematic and pathological positions. The discomfort and anxiety are extended to viewers to make them think twice about potential decisions that can have negative and altering effects on their lives. (Thomas 119-120)

This observation becomes particularly relevant when considering the extent of influence TV's representations do indeed have when shaping discourses about teenage sexuality. In this instance it is useful to remember that, content wise, *16 and Pregnant* never provides information or mentions issues closely connected to preventing teenage pregnancy – whether that may be discussing or touching upon abstinence, condoms, the pill or even abortion thematically (Lance et. al. 292). Additionally, the show fails to address the prominently highlighted points of socioeconomic disadvantage and intergenerational poverty (Furstenberg 74). Following the analysis I have provided so far, this thesis would connect the claimed effectiveness of *16 and Pregnant* fighting teenage pregnancy (Dinh) with creating and instilling anxiety in the show's teenage viewers, rather than through supposedly “arming' teenagers with the knowledge that is necessary for them to navigate ambivalent sexual situations that they may encounter” (Todd 45). Indeed, Margaret Tally argues that “the moralizing discourses of these

shows end up remaining silent as to how to really address this social problem, other than to watch with pleasure and fascination as these young live become even more precarious” (Guglielmo and Stewart xii).

In sum, all the predominant textualities that shape the generic verisimilitude of *16 and Pregnant* I have discussed work to represent a certain cultural verisimilitude – that of teenage sexuality and pregnancy – as immediate, within a cause-effect relationship that appears to be unchangeable, simply showing the 'harsh truth' (Dolgen) of the struggle that are the consequences of teenage pregnancy in contemporary American culture. This fits into the 'realist' aesthetic and textuality, as TV realism “resolves contradictions by representing a unified and rational world of causes and effects, actions and consequences, moral choices and rewards or punishments” (Bignell 219). Additionally to the omniscient camera, this function of TV realism also “distances the viewer from the contradictory and ambiguous dynamics of reality and suggests that political action to intervene in the ways that reality is produced from day to day is unnecessary” (ibid.), which is where the textualities which create a personal, autobiographic perspective – the cartoon-diary continuity segments, the teenage girls as narrators, as well as having an emotionally juxtaposition structure throughout the editing of the show that is strictly told from their point-of-view – and make the consequences of teenage sexuality a 'reality' that the teenage girl appears to have brought on herself, and now must deal with herself. Mary Friedman criticizes this kind of representation of teenage pregnancy and motherhood as a simplification (67), which are then translated into a moral panic, as teenage parenthood in connection “[...] poverty and violence [...] is] presented as logical conclusions to the perceived moral failings of the show's protagonists” (Friedman 68).

This, together with the textual focus on creating evocative emotion throughout *16 and Pregnant*, is where its teenage audience finds its offered subject position. Even though it appears that *16 and Pregnant* is giving the minority of pregnant teenage girls a voice and a chance at empowerment, it is necessary to point out the many ways *16 and Pregnant* has delimited its own polysemy as a potentially feminist text. In addition to the ideological 'realist' structure, *16 and Pregnant* represents teenage pregnancy and parenthood as a primarily female burden through the very narrow, textual focus on the teenage girl exclusively, omitting perspectives of her family, friends and partners, which are only marginally featured if the struggle of the teenage girl can be enhanced in its emphasis on her problematic, counter-

hegemonic existence as an 'out-of-the-norm' teenager, as well as a 'pre-adult'. Therefore, it could be argued that the audience's pleasure in recognizing this subject position is closely related to the moral panic and anxiety of '*it-could-happen-to-you*' in two ways. Firstly, in recognizing the in-between, counter-hegemonic subject position of these teenagers, and that their struggles stem from their incomplete identity and too-early sexuality, and the mistaken attempt at self-work through transgressing into *adult* discursive spaces of heteronormative sexuality and parenthood logically which resulted in consequences they now must bear. Secondly, and simultaneously, viewers can derive pleasure out of the fact that they are or will *not* be in this same position of the pregnant teenage girl – *because* teenage pregnancy has been constructed as an 'epidemic' – which reaffirms the appropriateness of their own subject position within the discursive divide of adolescence and adulthood which is primarily influenced by discourses of age and sexuality.

These analytical points are relevant to make because, while analyzing the way *16 and Pregnant* represents teenage sexuality, it is also worth keeping in mind how the TV text's generic and cultural verisimilitude is invested in 'social formations' (Gledhill 361). Representations in *16 and Pregnant* do not necessarily create new, emergent discourses on teenage sexuality, yet, they definitely promote certain discourses over others as Fiske has argued, even when TV is not the source of a certain discourse, representations are worth analyzing because they strengthen “the public presence of that identity, inflected it in certain ways, and, in embodying it, made it more powerful in people's imagination” (Fiske, *Media* 11). This is why a look beyond structural textualities of *16 and Pregnant* is necessary, with a focus on analyzing how these representations are relying on, constructing or reiterating dominant discourses on teenage sexuality.

3.6. *16 and Pregnant's* relational talk on teenage sexuality

Even though looking at the textuality of *16 and Pregnant* and the ways it represents teenage sexuality and teenage pregnancy, the analysis' perspective should be expanded if it wants to be able to evaluate *16 and Pregnant's* representations of teenage sexuality, as well as its place and

influence as a TV text on broader discourses on teenage sexuality in contemporary American culture.

Therefore, I will still operate along structural levels, but go beyond textualities and the formalistic make-up of the TV text and look at the relational dynamics of discourse, and how teenage pregnancy and sexuality is talked about within those dynamics. For analytical purposes, I will consider the two most dominantly featured relational dynamics in *16 and Pregnant*: interactions between the teenage participants and their parents, as well as the targeted teenage audience. Focusing on these analytical levels will provide a less clear cut, but more nuanced understanding in comparison to simply and vaguely assume that *16 and Pregnant*'s 'content' has a clear cut 'influence' on current American, sociocultural discourses on teenage sexuality. Furthermore, I shall attempt to connect relational discourses with the textualities I have discussed before, and whether they seek to maintain or to subvert them. These textual and discursive levels will necessarily overlap in some places more so than in others, as textualities and their discourses are interwoven in a reciprocal relationship.

In order to analyze *16 and Pregnant*'s discourse on teenage sexuality, I will look at relevant instances of talk and dialogue shared in the relational dynamics of parent-teenage participants, as well as teenage-narrator and teenage-audience. This is analytically tied to Foucault's observation that "power [...] is relational, it is created in the relationships which sustain it" (Weeks 7), which is why my analysis will be framed along those dominant relational dynamics. Analyzing instances of talk through such questions as who talks to whom about what and how – relying on which discourse – will help my analysis to uncover more about how instances of power within those relational dynamics are struggling with or maintaining certain discourses on teenage sexuality. This is of the utmost importance, since similarly to gender, race and other categories of social formation, discursive expressions of age and sexuality are "always context specific and need to be understood in relation to" people and the positions from which they speak to each other, as well as for what purpose (Paltridge 33). Moreover, looking at teenage sexuality as 'being done' within relational dynamics and the language used makes analytical sense because sexuality, as other social categories, cannot be reduced to sexual acts, but are rather constituted through "[t]he ways that people speak [...] from] particular roles, activities and personality traits, such as being a mother, gossiping and being modest" (Paltridge 36). Analyzing these relational dynamics will help investigate how highly naturalized

discourses on age and sexuality might be maintained, or are struggling to be maintained as such, especially considering that “we inhabit ideology [in] always active and complex processes of strategy and negotiation” (Thwaites 175).

3.6.1. Relational talk – parents and teens

The relational dynamic between the teenage participants and their parents in *16 and Pregnant* is a highly relevant one, not just because historically the discursive struggle of child and teenage sexuality has been firmly placed within adult, and primarily parental authority (Jackson 231, Rivkin 897). Rather, it is of more urgent importance because it is this relational dynamic that frames the conflict scenes that *16 and Pregnant*'s emotionally evocative and anxiety inducing structure is hinging upon. Not surprisingly, but all the more relevant, the interaction and talk shared between parents and teens on the show is primarily organized by struggles of what could be identified as crumbling parental control and teenage failure, which makes this relational dynamic a primary site of struggle and negotiation over *what* teenage sexuality can be represented as in *16 and Pregnant*.

When looking at the relational dynamic between the teenage participants and their parents, it must be noted that the overwhelming majority of the interactions are taking place between the pregnant teenage girl and her family; in four out of the six episodes of the first season the teenage fathers' parents are either completely absent or only sporadically involved. From the very start, this shifts the frequency of interactions – and conflicts – toward being mainly a matter of the pregnant teenage girl and her parents, in most cases her mother. This, perhaps very subtly but all the more powerfully, shifts the discursive struggle over into an all-female relational dynamic. Male figures, whether teenage or not, remain either absent or on the margins, rarely ever taking part in the discussions, struggles and conflicts. This points toward the fact that, from the very beginning, the talk about anything relating to pregnancy and teenage sexuality is a matter of the teenage girl and her parents, rather than the teenage boy and his parents or the teenage couple. Similarly to the textualities analyzed above, this focus of the parent-teen relational dynamic renders the struggle of being a teenage parent a gendered burden to be taken on by the teenage girl, first and foremost.

Further, the overwhelming majority of interactions can be described as either parental advice, or a conflict that erupts between the parents and teenagers. While the topic at the center

of those conflicts can vary, the discursive underpinning appears to be that of appropriate age and parenthood, expressing itself in the ideological assumption of *'too-young-to-be-parents'*. Even though it can be found in all the conflict scenes, it is rarely ever directly addressed or elaborated upon. This is noteworthy exactly *because* of its obviousness, presenting itself as the common-sense fact that teenagers are too young to be parents; this is firmly placed within the myth of the family, where the roles of teenagers and parents *'go-without-saying'* (O'Brien and Szeman 63). That inherently irresponsible teenagers would be taking on what should be deemed an *'adult responsibility'* is at the core of *16 and Pregnant's* problematization of teenage pregnancy, and in a reductionist extension the latent 'cause' that should be prevented, namely active teenage sexuality. Therefore, I will now take a look at how this particular discourse on age is communicated across the power dynamic of parents and their teenagers, as well as between the pregnant teens and their audience, to finally investigate how the *16 and Pregnant's* discourses are couched in already existing American discourses on teenage sexuality.

3.2.2. Parental control and teenage failure

Even though all of *16 and Pregnant's* conflicts between parents and teenagers appears to be hinging upon the problem of 'babies-having-babies' (Friedman 68), there are nuances within the scenes which openly bring out other power struggles that are not directly addressed in those instances when the teenagers are being confronted with being *'too young'*. Those instances are less obvious than those where teenagers are being directly told that they lack responsibility because of their too-young age, although, as is shown in Maci's episode, they are still reliant on the discourse of age that teenagers are *not* fit to be parents, which very commonly goes-without-saying. This mainly relies on the common sense fact that teenagers are inherently irresponsible and unable to fulfill *adult* parenthood requirements due to their age, a naturalized, biological state which they are unable to overcome or rectify through self-work. In this scene, Ryan's parents sit with the couple in the kitchen, striking up one of only two *'how-could-this-happen'* conversations within the entire first season. After a forced conversation full of stammering and stuttering on the teenage couple's part, Ryan's father concludes:

Ryan's father: "Well, he ruined you." (*they laugh*)

Ryan's father asks whether Maci's parents talked to her about sex.

Maci: “That's awkward.” (“Maci”, *16 and Pregnant*)

Likewise, Ebony's episode provides the only other instance when the '*how-could-this-happen*' is openly addressed between parents and their teenage children. Arguably, the possibility of even asking the question of *how-could-this-happen* implies that the parents see their supposed 'control' over their children fail and now try to find out why their children have overstepped this discursive boundary of their assumed asexuality. While Ebony's mother allows herself only a short moment of lamenting that she insisted, “Use protection, I don't wanna be a grandma yet. And look, I'm gonna be a grandma!” (Ebony's mother in “Ebony”, *16 and Pregnant*), the scene is inter-cut with Josh and his parents having the same conversation, with a very different dynamic:

Josh's mother: “So, how old were you when we started talking about sex with you.”

Josh: (*makes an awkward face, as if it were a ridiculous question to him*)

Josh's mother: (*exclaims*) Seriously, Joshua!

Josh: (*quietly*) I was 13.

Josh's mother: You had us sign papers for that class you were taking. The day you came home and explained to me how babies are made?

Josh: Oh yeah. The sex-ed classes.

Josh's mother: You made sure you knew what precautions to take and that you had those precautions.

Josh: And we used them.

Josh's mother: (*rolls her eyes*) ... then, why are you going to be a daddy?

Josh: 'Cause...I dunno.

Not only is this interaction noteworthy for being the only instance when sexual education at school is mentioned – and in this case, is mentioned in failing to prevent teenage pregnancy, adding to the fear of '*it-could-happen-to-you*' – it also provides a contrast of the gendered talk that the teenagers have to face when being confronted by their parents. Even though the parental control was supplemented by sexual education, which is shown to have been ineffective, the audience is presented with Josh's evasive response of not knowing how 'this' could have happened, nor is he expected to (Guglielmo and Stewart 29). He is openly avoiding all responsibility and assuming his hegemonic, infantilized subject-position of a teenager who is expected to know, but definitely *not* expected to act on his knowledge; rather, teenagers are meant to access *adult*, sexual knowledge, not in order to develop sexual agency through informed consent (Jackson 251), but rather, to manage heteronormative risks and restrict their own sexuality. In the only instance where a teenage father is asked '*how-could-this-happen*',

Maci's boyfriend Ryan is as embarrassed and speechless, similarly evading any responsibility which is further “reinforcing the social norm that 'boys are generally not held responsible for their sexual actions' and that girls are 'responsible for controlling boy's sexuality as well as their own'” (Guglielmo and Stewart 29).

While some of the gendered blame of unplanned pregnancy appears to be on the teenage fathers in these cases, everything that comes *after* the blame is for the teenage girl to bear (Guglielmo and Stewart 30), whether that may be struggling with child care, relationship problems or graduating from high school. Furthermore, the fact that these conversations happen without further reflection, and that parents are questioning the legitimacy of their teenaged children's sexual behavior – as opposed to discussing what course of action should be taken, for instance – appears to be a common sense fact and showcases the clear power dynamic, imbuing the parents with the defining, discursive power over the legitimate forms of teenage sexuality in this relational dynamic.

Whereas these interactions do not constitute an outright conflict, they definitely appear to be confrontational, which is the primary tone of the parent-teen relational dynamic. The effectiveness of parental control is always questioned: the crumbling parental control over their teenagers' sexuality, the failure to '*stay-teen*' on the teenagers' part, as well as the underlying naturalizing discourse of age that purports that teenagers are simply and inherently '*too-young*' to be responsible parents can be found to be underpinning all of the parent-teenager dynamic in *16 and Pregnant*'s first season. The question raises itself whether *16 and Pregnant* gives a potentially subversive voice to teenage girls who rise to the seemingly daunting challenge of being both a teenage girl and a mother, or whether there is a reiteration of the dominant, heteronormative space of sexuality and parenthood which is clearly, and obviously demarcated as *adult*.

This discursive struggle between crumbling parental control and teenage failure is especially noteworthy because it appears as if after the parental control has been broken in such a significant way that it seems even more crucial and in need of reasserting control over the teen's sexuality in light of them '*having made a mistake*' – or, in individualized terms, having made a risky choice – namely, getting pregnant or, arguably, being sexually active at all. This discursive need for adult parents to reassert their control over their teenager's sexuality – which is arguably working to maintain the divide between what it means to be a teenager and an adult

– is most obvious in Ebony's episode. Even *after* she had gotten pregnant by her fiancé, his mother did not allow them to sleep in the same room. Here, redrawing those boundaries by Josh's mother through parental control meant both maintaining the demarcations of adult authority, and putting Ebony and her fiancé back into a teenage discursive space that is devoid of potential sexual expression, *especially* after the transgression into the *adult* sexual space has occurred. Consequently, as the following section will discuss, reasserting parental control through infantilization constitutes the normalization of the lack of sexual agency of teens, especially after have visibly acted on it.

Conflicts and fights: reasserting parental control over teenage sexuality

The scenes of conflicts are without a doubt the most visible and most frequent relational dynamic occurring in *16 and Pregnant* throughout the first season. This might be the result of the textualities that I have analyzed earlier, however, to stop there would be to miss taking the next analytical step forward. These fights and conflicts between parents and their pregnant teenage daughters are the discursive terrain where the friction caused by those discursive power struggles over defining what it *means* to be an American teenager can be visibly identified, and how teenage sexuality can be articulated in this space. Thus, my analysis needs to pay special attention to those scenes which, at a superficial glance, might appear to solely exist in order to add dramatic content, provide emotionally evocative scenes and attract viewers.

When taking a look at this specific kind of relational dynamic, it needs to be noted that the parents' control that is exerted over their children is precarious and already failing. The fact that their children are becoming parents at an age that is agreed upon as being '*too young*' could also be seen as a reflection of their poor parenting. Not only this, but reiterating the discursive boundaries of adolescence is also about demarcating and maintaining the discursive space of adulthood, and all its power over children and adolescents. This adds another dimension to the discursive struggle, as these conflicts are not exclusively about teenaged daughters and sons overstepping their discursive place. Rather, it is also about parents reaffirming what it *means* to be a responsible parent, which is an *adult* heteronormative, hegemonic space that, in the face of their teenage daughter's pregnancy, is highly unstable. It is within the reassertion of control over these discursive boundaries where my analysis will understand the following conflicts and fights.

Farrah's episode offers a myriad of examples where her mother attempts to not simply support her in her decision-making, but instead tells her what she should do and say. Since the father of Farrah's unborn baby is absent, the episodes features Farrah expressing an interest in a co-worker of hers, which prompts the following conversation:

Farrah's mother: "Well, all I got to say is, explain to him that you like him as a good friend."

Farrah: "I'm not even gonna say that. I'm not even gonna go there. *I like you as a good friend.* mother, it doesn't even have to go there."

Farrah's mother: "But, here's the deal. You let him know that you're six months pregnant."

Farrah: "He does know that, mother. Everyone at work knows that."

Farrah's mother: "Kind of repeat that to him. Say, *hello, I'm six months pregnant, I'm not looking for any kind of relationship at any point here.*"

Farrah's episode offers the viewers a rare glimpse into teenage sexuality that does not revolve solely around reproduction, pregnancy or the daunting prospect of parental responsibilities, but is immediately curbed by her mother, making it very explicit that, especially after transgressing into adult sexuality, Farrah should not seek dates nor relationships. By reinforcing what decisions her daughter should make in her own social life, Farrah's mother puts her into a single-mother position not by choice, but by her heteronormative expectations of adolescence. Farrah is a pregnant teen, yet with still a greater emphasis on being a *teen* which is something she is supposed to be, and therefore act accordingly. Embedded within the realist logic of *16 and Pregnant's* textuality, this could be argued to constitute punishment for overstepping those discursive boundaries of adolescence (Bignell 218), as she cannot even obtain permission from her mother to engage in dating, which would constitute something that is not transgressing into *adult* sexuality, *because* she has already failed to "observe limits" (D'Emilio and Freedman 264) and made the 'mistake' of getting pregnant.

While Farrah partly adopts this position herself as well – reassuring her mother that she does not *need* a boyfriend right now – she also tells the audience that she used to go on a lot of dates, and that she does not want to cut herself off now ("Farrah", *16 and Pregnant*). Towards the end of the evening however, Farrah, nor her mother, needs to make a decision: Farrah's co-worker stands her up on her date, which causes her mother to reiterate that she does not need men. She tells her, "after you get done with school, college, then you can look. Right now

you've got to focus" (Farrah's mother in "Farrah", *16 and Pregnant*). This, as Anastasia Todd argues, despite showing potential for subversiveness because of Farrah's willingness to be *both* a teen and a mother, it still ends up further reiterating "hegemonic discourse of patriarchal motherhood" which is "forgoing teenage sexual desire, already constructed as inappropriate and 'dangerous' by the larger discourse on teenager girls' sexuality" (Guglielmo ix).

Later in Farrah's episode, she asks a hospital employee about the appropriate time to induce labor. Before the employee can respond to her, her mother tells her to stop asking such 'grotesque questions', upon which the hospital employee offers to discuss things privately if this makes the mother and sister uncomfortable ("Farrah", *16 and Pregnant*). Farrah reacts shyly and says in a low, embarrassed tone of voice, "I have to know" ("Farrah", *16 and Pregnant*). While this is a small incident, it still exemplifies the kind of parental, infantilizing control Farrah's mother actively claims on her daughter. Whereas before she told Farrah what she should do – to give up her baby for adoption – and what she should say – to tell her co-worker that she does not want to date, despite the fact that she does – Farrah's mother now tries to withhold information about Farrah's *own labor*. Even at the very real prospect of giving birth, her mother still treats her in such a way that she decides for Farrah what she should and should not know.

Despite this scene only taking seconds, it exemplifies Foucault's complex of power-knowledge (Weeks 7) and hints towards the ideological underpinnings that come to bear in the debate of whether to provide abstinence-only or comprehensive sexual education at schools; the former would withhold information in the fear that the latter would provide pre-adult knowledge to teenagers who would then enact this knowledge. Arguably, and perhaps oddly connected to this, is the criticism of *16 and Pregnant* glamorizing teenage pregnancy, which "suggested that by airing these programs MTV inspires copycat behavior" (Dolgen). As I have established before, this criticism is based on the obsolete conception that certain 'media messages' will simply have a desired 'effect', where historically a young audience has been perceived as especially vulnerable and gullible – an idea common to all discussions featuring adolescents and media consumption, as exemplified when blaming violent video-games for youth delinquency and school shootings.

After Farrah has recuperated from her birth, she realizes that getting her own car is going to be a necessity, not only because of her job, but also because of child care duties. Her

mother outright forbids her to get her own car, before she changes her mind, only to tell Farrah what *exact* car she should buy. This preceded the following exchange:

Farrah: "I like Ford Focuses, mom. It's a cute car I would drive."
 Farrah's mom: "Yeah, well, we're not gonna get that."
 Farrah: "Oh my God, you're dumb."
 Farrah's mom: "Yeah, I know. Now, what you need to do is go in -"
 Farrah's: "Mom, shut up."
 Farrah's mom: "I'm not gonna sit here and be disrespected by you. You're completely outta control."
 Farrah: (*crying*) "No, but you are."
 Farrah's mom: "You can't understand anything!"
 Farrah: "No, mother, you can't! That's why you have so many problems!"
 Farrah's mother: "Alright, Farrah, I'm gonna tell you right now -"
 Farrah: "Don't talk to me anymore."
 Farrah's mother: "I've had enough of your belligerent anti-Christ attitude!"
 Farrah: "No, that's what you are."
 Farrah's mother: "I mean it!"
 Farrah: "Oh, okay mother, I try to tell you something and you don't listen."
 Farrah's mother: "Yes, because you're wrong!"
 Farrah: "No, I'm not!"
 Farrah's mother: "And I'm trying to tell you the right thing!"
 Farrah: "Oh, too bad, because-"
 Farrah's mother: (*hits her on the arm and yells*) "I've had enough! I mean it! You know so much, that's why you're also in so much trouble, Farrah."
 Farrah: "Oh, I'm not in any trouble."
 Farrah's mother: "Yeah, right. That's why you're in this beautiful situation right now, huh Farrah?"
 Farrah: "Yeah, because I have to deal with you, you're right. I'm sorry, if it sucks to be in my life, you're right."
 Farrah's mother: "There you go, there you go, pitty poo." ("Farrah", *16 and Pregnant*)

This interaction features a wealth of language that couches Farrah's complicated relationship with her mothers – and her pregnancy – within the complex of power and knowledge in respect to the multiaxiality of sexuality and age: 'out of control', 'respect', 'knowing so much', 'being in trouble' are all visible struggles over power within the discourse on age, and its divide of adolescence and adulthood. Additionally to the binary sentiment of 'doing the right thing' or 'being wrong', Farrah openly rebels against her mother's supposed authority over her from an adult, discursive place, whereas her mother still considers her a child having trespassed into adult sexuality. Her mother, as a result, expects to be respected, not because of her expertise or because of the way she is supporting her daughter, but because of her discursive role as an adult and a mother in relation to her daughter, which puts her into an automatic position of authority

over her daughter. She continuously implies that she knows better than her daughter, something Farrah does not seem to agree with. To her mother, Farrah 'knowing so much' is the source of all her trouble and her daughter's 'beautiful situation'.

Similarly to Farrah's mother, Josh's mother's attempt to control her son leads him to leave his parental home and move into his fiancée's house. This scene was accompanied by Josh's mother continuously yelling in the background of scenes, one of the subtitled portions reading that "[if he] kept it in his pants, it wouldn't be this way. We talked to him about sex since he was ten years old!" (Josh's mother in "Ebony", *16 and Pregnant*). This clearly implies that she realizes that even after having provided her son with knowledge about sexual reproduction, her parental control failed when her teenaged son impregnated his fiancée. In Josh's case, the audience witnesses the very rare instance of sexual education being mentioned, not as the proposed and needed measure to prevent teenage pregnancy, but as something that has *failed* to prevent teenage pregnancy, further cementing the associated moral panic of '*it-could-happen-to-you*', while additionally putting the blame for teenage pregnancy on inherently irresponsible teenagers, seemingly unable to manage themselves and the risky choice of engaging in *adult* sexuality.

These conflicts are remarkable as they are the terrain for the discursive struggle over what teenage sexuality – when it has already resulted in pregnancy – can possibly mean. Here, the relational dynamics of discourse – the 'markedness' of deviance, and the 'neutrality' of the norm – becomes clearer in the interactions of parents and their teenage daughters, and while this binary construction has been criticized by feminist theorists as well as Foucault as a *way* of organizing reality, their oppositionality represents the dominant way of constructing reality, rather than reflecting it (Chandler 112). This is expanded upon with Fiske's understanding of discourses being 'named' or 'unnamed' (43), where I would consider adding age to gender and capitalism as a discourse that 'goes without saying'.

That the discourse on age and sexuality becomes only visible in its struggle against the potential validity of teenage pregnancy and parenthood exposes sexuality and pregnancy as 'obviously' adult and works to differentiate *teenage* pregnancy and sexuality as highly visible in their deviance from the unnamed norm of adult sexuality and pregnancy. Through questioning – and in *16 and Pregnant*'s case arguing and fighting – the potential legitimacy of teenage pregnancy and sexuality, *adult* sexuality is able "to present itself as common sense, as an

objective, innocent reflection of the real” (Fiske 42), while also attempting to “prevent a struggle over meaning by naturalizing *their* meaning – their economic and social power is mobilized discursively, ideologically, and culturally to exnominate itself beyond the realm of potential opposition” (Fiske 44).

When considering that the potential opposition would have to come from adolescents themselves, then the governmentality of teenage sexuality could be considered to further maintain the common sense discourse on age and sexuality. Moreover, when looking at the broader discursive understanding of teenagers, they appear to inhabit a paradoxical role in contemporary American society: on the one hand they are considered legal minors who are unable to enter sexual relationship – not being the specific 'age of consent' that the law requires (O'Brien and Szeman 66) – and are, at the same time, conflated with children in sociocultural discourse, while also constituting a market force to be reckoned (Osgerby 52) with because of their disposable income, which is further supported by them taking on liminally adult roles that are supposed to teach them self-responsibility, such as taking on jobs, paying for housing, studying and preparing for college and owning a car, as is the case with many of the teenagers featured in *16 and Pregnant*.

Indeed, when considering discursive boundaries of being a teenager and take into account

driver's licences, paid employment, and subjection to the *Criminal Code* only begin to suggest, the concept of 'youth' is a slippery one, with no clear biological or cultural grounding in an objective distinction between childhood and adulthood. Historical research shows that the idea of childhood is a relatively recent one, emerging in the eighteenth century in conjunction with new ideas about education and psychological development. (O'Brien and Szeman 66)

Moreover, being a 'teenager' can be conceived as an intricately American category of social formation, which is what further puts the identity of the teenager in a paradoxical position in connection to *adult* parenthood: having stood for 'nonconformity', a carefree and 'cool' lifestyle of leisure, as well as resisting “the trappings of encroaching middle age, and favors instead the tastes and pursuits” (Osgerby 52), the teenager is anything but a 'natural' stage of an individual's biological ageing process, complete with inherent characteristics and lifestyles, but rather has been shaped by TV and mass media from the very start (ibid.).

When considering these simultaneous, paradoxical discourses on adolescence and

American 'teenagerness', then, they can be found to be naturalized on the relational dynamic level of parents and their teenage children exactly *through* representing them in an oppositional, reducing, mythical way (Thwaites 65-67). Highlighting parental-teenage conflicts from a strictly teenage POV, together with a teenage narration, is paradoxically disempowering and locates the discursive struggle over disrupting and maintaining discourses of age and sexuality within a personal, individualized terrain that is highly emotional, vulnerable and autobiographical, and therefore can be seen as erasing important "historical conditions of inequality in which actual human beings live" (O'Brien and Szeman 63). This mythical structuring of the established discourse on teenage sexuality within *16 and Pregnant* is not necessarily 'harmonious' at first glance, yet appears to represent the struggles of teenage pregnancy as a common-sense consequence of too-early sexuality. It also brushes aside teenagers as a recent sociocultural phenomenon and naturalizes their systemic surroundings – socioeconomic backgrounds, family histories, support systems both private and institutionalized omitted (Daniel 89), supposedly in favor of 'giving them a voice', rendering their struggle, as well as the cause of it, deeply personal.

It follows, then, that when a teenage girl is occupying this in-between space of discursive struggle over the possible meanings of age, sexuality as well as parenthood, a different mode of self-work emerges as an attempt to negotiate teenage parenthood within the discursive dominance of adult heteronormativity.

3.6.1.2. Infantilizing: between 'too young' and 'growing up fast'

Within heteronormativity, the *adult* space of parenthood and sexuality is being trespassed upon by the sexually active and now pregnant teenage girl, which is the terrain of the show's central discursive struggle. In *16 and Pregnant*, this struggle between maintaining the adult, heteronormative space of parenthood is visible in the majority of interactions between teens and their parents, which mostly hinge upon the discourse of teenagers inherently '*being-too-young*' to be parents themselves.

The most striking examples of such struggling interactions are shown in Farrah's episode, with her mother keeping a tight grip around her daughter's every day life and decision-making, effectively *enforcing* the parental control, despite her pregnant teenage daughter

becoming a mother herself very soon. In one of the first scenes of Farrah and her mother – her father only on the sidelines – Farrah's mother suggests adoption as the route to go:

Farrah's mother: “You know, looking at what's best for the child and how much time it takes to have a baby, it might be the most loving thing to put the child up for adoption. Having a child I not like having a puppy.”

Farrah: “I don't think it would be that hard once you look at everything and get everything together...”

Farrah's mother: “Believe me, Farrah, it's exhausting.” (“Farrah”, *16 and Pregnant*)

Within the same interaction, Farrah's mother both seemingly attempts to give her daughter well-meant advice while reigning her back into her discursive space of adolescence, which does not leave any room for being a parent of a newborn. By comparing Farrah's impending parental responsibilities to taking care of a puppy, Farrah's mother puts her daughter's pregnancy firmly within the language of infantilization. Especially because Farrah is not involved in a relationship with her baby's biological father, Farrah's mother takes over as the primary authority figure, creating another gendered instance of the all-female burden of pregnancy and parenthood. Throughout Farrah's episode, she continues to get into arguments with her mother who in turn says that Farrah's being pregnant has been hard because she only wanted 'the best' for her daughter, implying that, once again, being pregnant is not within the discursiveness of what it means to be a teenager (“Farrah”, *16 and Pregnant*).

Very similarly, Amber's mother reiterates that “You're still a little baby to me”, as well as agreeing with her divorced husband that “At least they're [Amber and her boyfriend] not married”, implying that, to her, Amber will remain firmly within the discursiveness of childhood and adolescence, despite her pregnancy (“Amber”, *16 and Pregnant*). Not just the teenagers' parents, but Farrah herself articulates this *being-too-young* discourse without much reflection when she tells her friends that she thinks it is 'crazy' that she is a mother now (“Farrah”, *16 and Pregnant*). This is important, because it shows how the discourses on teenage sexuality are not simply shaped and reinforced by authoritative discursive formations – parents, school, religion – but also by the teenagers themselves.

Indeed, the governmentality of teenage sexuality is starkly present in Catelynn's episode, the only episode the entire season that features a couple who chose to adopt, not solely for the sake of their unborn baby, but prominently because they felt they *needed* to 'stay teen'.

When asked for their reasons why they are going to place their unborn baby by adoption agent, Catelynn replies:

I think it's the right choice just because I don't really have a stable house hold, we're too young, we wanna go to school, you know, we wanna go to college, finish college, get on our feet and then maybe have kids later on. (Catelynn in “Catelynn”, *16 and Pregnant*)

The life path Catelynn outlined for herself is not a unique one, but one that is set out to preserve heteronormativity where the “subject is expected to evolve from childhood through adolescence to adulthood by assuming subject positions that are centered around the nuclear family and which are gendered, sexualized, and fixed in time and space (Dhaenes 306). It is also firmly set within the current middle class discourse of American 'teenagerness', where education and work are central and expected to be treated as a priority (Bonell 269), even coming from such an 'unstable', lower-middle class household as Catelynn and her boyfriend Tyler. This hegemony of the naturalization of age is shaping the path current teenagers are expected to take when transitioning from adolescence into adulthood, which is so strongly embedded within Catelynn and Tyler's way of thinking that the adoptive couple they end up choosing is described by them as having 'everything they always wanted to have' (“Catelynn”, *16 and Pregnant*). This goes against the wishes of their parents, who both argue that keeping it would be the 'right thing to do', as well as the best way for the baby to grow up, with Catelynn and Tyler as its 'natural' parents (“Catelynn”, *16 and Pregnant*). While these arguments openly upset Catelynn and Tyler, they still decide to go through with their adoption plans. This potentially subversive decision – both upsetting the family myth and avoiding the struggles of teenage parenthood – is eventually disarmed when a potentially empowering narrative develops into being about choosing a nearly 'perfect' couple and future nuclear-family because their baby will have everything 'they've never had', which constitutes reaffirming the family myth themselves. Despite the fact that the nuclear family cannot be maintained by the young, teenage couple themselves, their adoption process and reasons are still represented to “feed into the performance of heterosexuality and the fulfillment of the heterosexual imaginary” (McClanahan 143).

The other unstable, lower-middle-class household that is featured is presented in

Whitney's episode, a fifteen year old girl who lives with her mother and grandmother in a trailer in Georgia. Her mother calls her a 'poor little baby' when Whitney is resistant to lectures of all the duties that motherhood supposedly entails:

Whitney's mother: "That's what you gotta do."

Whitney: "But I don't want to."

Whitney's mother: "You gotta do all these things at one time. Burping, changing diaper and cook and make sure the house is clean, the laundry is done."

Whitney: "Just because I didn't want to cook anything. I have to hear this lecture."

Whitney's mother: (*coos and pets Whitney's cheek*) "Ohhh, poor little baby. You wish you'd waited?"

Whitney: "With what?"

Whitney's mother: (*touches her belly*)

Whitney: "No."

Whitney's mother: "Oh." ("Whitney", *16 and Pregnant*)

Whitney's mother, herself pregnant at the same time as her young daughter, is firmly putting Whitney in this counter-hegemonic, in-between space of a teenage parent by infantilizing her resistance to take on what motherhood is *supposed* to mean. Treating her like a helpless child while at the same time trying to teach her *adult* responsibilities is what makes Whitney's struggle a noteworthy one, because she herself does not regret getting pregnant. She is also the first and only teenage girl who openly voiced having had thoughts of 'giving it up' – whether that may be adoption or abortion – although the arguably absolutist way she dismisses ever having considered giving up her baby as "hard to believe" ("Whitney", *16 and Pregnant*) is effectively silencing all those teens who adopted and chose abortion, at least in this episode.

That keeping the baby is a fearful and daunting prospect at best is once more reinforced by the dominant discourse of teenagers inherently '*being-too-young*' to be responsible parents. It simply seems impossible, which is a notion that is reinforced in each and every episode of *16 and Pregnant*, even more so when the couple decides to keep the baby. Perhaps conversely to the notion that responsible teenage parenting is impossible, adoption is not presented as an 'easy' way to circumvent the paradoxical place of teenage parenthood. In Catelynn's episode, the adoption agent makes sure that they realize the consequences of their decision:

Adoption agent: "You have to come to the place where you make a decision about what's right for you. Sometimes, the most loving thing we can do is to be selfless and let go."

Catelynn: "Mm-hmm."

Tyler: "Yes."

Adoption agent: "And so ... that doesn't mean it's easy. It doesn't mean that it's not

without grief and without loss, because, I'll tell you, it will be the hardest that you've ever had to do in your life."

While taking on the adult responsibilities of parenthood as a teenager seems impossible, not being parents and opting for adoption, too, is represented as the hardest decision of their lives. The teenage couple accept that they are too young to take on parenthood, but they also accept that giving up the baby is not going to be the easier choice. In understanding rather than, perhaps, questioning the teenage couple's choice, the adoption agent as well reaffirms the common-sense fact that they are too young to take care of their baby. Indeed, in this case, the adoption seems *'the right thing to do'* exactly because teenagers are meant to *'stay-teen'* and stay in school rather than raising kids, and therefore not transgressing and possibly destabilizing the hegemonic, heteronormative, adult space of parenthood and active sexuality.

A closer look at Catelynn's episode shows that adult parents are not necessarily more successful than their teenaged children would be at creating a normative, 'stable' environment for raising children. One of Catelynn's reasons for doubting her abilities to raise a child is her own upbringing which involved constantly moving to different houses and switching schools, as well as a divorce. Yet, the teenagers are still, by discursive default, unable to rise to the challenge due to their naturalized age. This becomes especially clear in Whitney's episode, when the teenage couple decides to move out because living with Whitney's mother and grandmother in a cramped mobile home is becoming less and less feasible with a baby on the way:

Whitney's mother: "I'm glad y'all are leaving but in a way I'm not. I don't care about the room either. I'm just worried about y'all. You're being young and idiots is stressful. You're gonna have to take on responsibilities of washing dishes and washing bottles..."

Whitney: "We are messy, but we're teenagers."

Weston: (*laughs*) "I do agree, I think we are filthy."

Whitney's mother: "I'm scared for you to leave."

Whitney: "Why?"

Whitney's mother: "Because! This is reality, right here, life."

Notably, Whitney's episode is the only one in the first season that features financial struggles which, as it will become clear when looking at the current American discourse surrounding this TV show and teenage pregnancy, is supposedly the most devastating consequence of teenage pregnancy. However, even when Whitney and Weston decide to move back to his mother's

house, Whitney's mother is scared for them to take on the *adult* responsibilities of parenthood as 'young idiots' ("Whitney", *16 and Pregnant*). She emphasizes the 'real life' hardships of taking care of an infant when they themselves are so young, but never once mentions the potential financial disaster that they are currently creating for themselves. Finally, this is especially noteworthy because while the audience is presented with Whitney's mother – mother of the pregnant teenage girl is pregnant herself – the episode still focuses on the teenage girl's struggle of '*being-too-young*' to take on the challenges of parenthood and adult life itself, naming *Whitney's* as a visible, out-of-the-teen norm discourse while even the possibility of questioning her mother's pregnancy is glossed over.

As I have shown, the textualities of RTV's generic verisimilitude – such as compressed time and mythical structure – creating a binary opposition and reduce the complexity of the relationship between the parents and their teenaged children to the point where only fights and conflicts are visible in *16 and Pregnant*, and only through the teenage girls' POV. The fact that they are the main focal point and narrator providing the main impression of continuity in her autobiographical tale is what embeds teenage sexuality and its consequences within not just social stigma, but struggling family relations. This constitutes a disruption of the validity of the myth of the family and the heterosexual imaginary, as well as struggling discursive divide between adolescence and adulthood, however, as I will show in the subsequent sections, these consequences are not represented as potentially subversive, but are rather defused as undesirable crises and tumultuous changes – through narration and POV – that teenage parents and their too-early sexuality have brought on themselves and now must struggle with.

Additionally to the '*how-this-could-happen*' talks and other scenes of familial conflict, the major discursive themes of '*being-too-young-to-parent*' introduce the almost overwhelming urge that the teenage girl feels to '*grow up*' in order to be a proper mother. To consolidate this with '*staying-teen*', on the other hand, appears impossible for teenage parents, which is further reiterated by the ceaseless reminders from their parents that being pregnant and a parent is a difficult task at best. Added to this is the continuous, underlying infantilization on the parents' part when faced with their crumbling control over their teenagers' sexuality. In the following section I will take a closer look at the instances of these discursive themes as they arise in the relational power dynamic of parent-teenager. As I intend to show, teenage pregnancy is represented as a problem "solely because it is a 'hard' [...] consequence of early and

irresponsible sex, and its purported cyclical nature remains tied to parents' ineffectiveness at regulating their children's sexuality" (Daniel 87). It follows, that additionally to the reassertion of parental control through infantilization, the discursive struggles are not simply about *restricting* or delimiting teenage sexuality, but at the same time maintaining what it means to be an adult. Consequently, the naturalization of age normalizes the lack of sexual agency of teenagers (Guglielmo and Stewart 29).

3.6.1.3. Adult, gendered responsibilities: parenting is *hard*

Through routine infantilization, parents are actively attempting to put the teenagers back into the teenage discursive space they are meant to occupy, while at the same time reiterating the notion that tells them that they will fail regardless of how hard they try, *because* they are teenagers. While their very existence as a pregnant teenager is blurring the discursive boundaries of adolescence and adulthood that inform sexuality in complicating and contradicting ways, the language that is used in those interactions is targeting the discursive space of adolescence that they are *supposed* to inhabit. This casts the representations of teenage sexuality, with the high visibility of pregnancy, primarily as a mistake that needs to be rectified by the adult parents by making it clear to their teenaged children that they *are* children specifically because it is complicated by the fact that they are expected to raise a child of their own. While abortion is rarely even hinted at as a valid option for these teenage girls, adoption is also portrayed as 'giving up' their child and not facing the impossible challenge of teenage parenthood.

The phrasing that is often chosen to drive home this impossibility is that parenthood is *hard* and *difficult*, something that is repeated over and over again throughout the first season. Qualifying parenthood as *difficult* might seem like a case of stating the obvious, however, simultaneously pushes this analysis to understand why exactly *16 and Pregnant* chooses to emphasize this through not just parents giving advice, but also through the teenage participant's narration. As I will show when discussing the second relational dynamic of the teenage narrator and their teenage audience, parenthood is represented as difficult not because it might be the young parents' first time raising a child; it is a herculean task *because they are teenagers*:

Farrah's mother: "Even if people are gossiping and are saying things that are not right, you remember that you have to walk with integrity."

Farrah's dad: "You know, right now, you are at an early part of your pregnancy, and it's all still novel and everything, but there's responsibility."

Additionally to parenthood being *hard* and *difficult*, it entails an unspoken, yet required sense of *responsibility* that appears to be distinctively personal, as well as unattainable by teenagers under any circumstance. The responsibility of parenthood appears to be implicitly understood, as if it were inherent in all *adult* parents and therefore requires no explanation. This discourse of '*goes-without-saying*' contributes to the naturalization of age – Ebony's faith that Josh would become a father as soon as he holds his baby ("Ebony", *16 and Pregnant*), for instance, or how Farrah immediately accepted motherhood and the unspoken bond between a mother and her baby right after birth ("Farrah", *16 and Pregnant*) – and reappears as a common sense 'reality' structuring 'real life', as Whitney's mom and grandmother keep informing her ("Whitney", *16 and Pregnant*). In the conversation above, Farrah's parents try to make her realize that having a child takes more responsibility than taking care of a puppy, yet never continue to explain what kind of responsibilities this would entail, nor explain how they could be shouldered by Farrah alone, even though she appears to be expected to.

This responsibility in *16 and Pregnant* seems to fall squarely onto the shoulders of the pregnant teen, and only in rare instances is the teenage father reminded that parenting is *hard*, but rather, is expected to be absent or non-supportive (McClanahan 146). Consequently, the talk that is shaping this aspect of teenage pregnancy and parenthood is gendered in that it is narrowly focused on the burden of motherhood and childcare. A scene shows Farrah and her mother at her doctor's appointment, sitting in the waiting room when the audience is presented the following interaction:

Farrah's mother: "It's gonna be a lot of work. Children are nice but they are also a lotta work."

Farrah: "They don't really do that much."

Farrah's mother: "That's true, they don't. The mother has to do everything."

Farrah: "It's not that hard." ("Farrah", *16 and Pregnant*)

Perhaps more urgently in Farrah's case, as she has no partner, she is being constantly reminded of how much *work* she will be facing when raising a child, her mother even reassuring her that she has to do *everything*. Despite Farrah's responses that seek to mitigate the fear her mother apparently wants to instil in her, still constitutes an acknowledgment of the gendered burden of

childcare.

In an effort to graduate from high school, Farrah seeks advice from a counselor at the local college. Without fail, he tells Farrah that being a mother and school 'is a lot to take on' ("Farrah", *16 and Pregnant*), rather than provide her with a realistic, feasible guide that could have her graduate despite the hurdles of pregnancy and child rearing. Transitioning into the next scene, Farrah lets the audience know that she is feeling let down and struggling to gain support. She asks her cousin, who had a baby at a young age with her partner, while out shopping for baby clothes. Even though uplifting a conversation for Farrah, 'parenthood' is once again understood as a gendered burden, which seems to be expected to be taken on by the mother rather than anyone else, even when a partner is available as in Amber's and in Whitney's episode.

Whitney, being the youngest in an all female household, is also faced with the common-sense fact that having a baby 'is a job'. The job description includes domesticity as well as fulfilling all of the child rearing duties. Whitney, however, does not feel the need to take on the expectations of motherhood, which causes her mother and grandmother to have this conversation, overheard by Whitney:

Whitney's mother: "What do you think about all this?"

Whitney's grandmother: "I'm worried sick."

Whitney's mother: "They need to take on some responsibility."

Whitney's grandmother: "They're old enough to have sex they thought, they've got to be old enough try and figure out how to be parents and good parents."

Whitney's mother: "They leave dishes all over around the bedroom, dirty clothes in the bathroom. They just make big ass messes and I'm tired of cleaning it up."

Whitney's grandmother: "I'm tired too." ("Whitney", *16 and Pregnant*)

Household chores and tidy rooms are the parental *responsibilities* that Whitney's mother and grandmother are worried about the most. This failure at domesticity is even more problematic as, being old enough to engage in a sexual relationship must inextricably entail parenthood. These assumptions are once again couched in a heteronormative hegemony where sexuality is limited to biological reproduction. Taking on the responsibility of these expectation seems to be included in parenthood, something that teenagers are, by default, expected to be unable to do. This directly struggles with the gendering of childcare and domesticity, as "childhood became perhaps the most intensely governed sector of personal existence (Rose 1989) and it was

mothers who were given the responsibility for this government [...]” (Skeggs and Wood 32), as teenage mothers fall into both categories: those who need to be governed, and those who need to govern.

In this respect, it is worth reiterating that the tension between occupying those two discursive spaces seems incompatible and beyond consolidation. The resulting urge to '*grow up fast*', as the phrase implies, is what teens feel they are expected to do, namely, to overcome their biological age which delimits the discursive boundaries of sexuality and parenthood and adopt characteristics that are deemed more 'adult' and 'mature'. For instance, as in Ebony's episode, she is willing to take on all the responsibilities of adolescence *and* adulthood as we see her working hard to graduate from high school, running a household while also mothering her baby and her fiancé (“Ebony”, *16 and Pregnant*). Comparatively, Maci is juggling college, work and taking care of her baby by herself while Ryan spends time with his friends. That in both instances the teenage *mothers* felt more compelled – when contrasted with their very reluctant and infantilized partners – to 'grow up' quickly is further evidence that parenthood *and* adulthood both rely on being gendered, naturalized discourses of age. The requirement of being an operationalizing self-work in order to achieve a discursively more 'mature' age is something which teenage girls, due to their pregnancy and birth, are confronted with earlier than their partners.

At the same time, this discursive 'aging' is another seemingly impossible challenge, as age and its inherent characteristics and abilities are naturalized, almost incorporated and then naturally shed when transitioning to other life stages. Rather, it can be understood as a metaphor where 'growing up quickly' implies that teens feel compelled to inhabit an *adult* rather than a *teenage* discursive space; instead of '*staying-teen*', they '*become grown up*'. This, I would argue, signifies the complete transgression into adult heteronormativity, and a necessary abandonment of 'teenagerness' brought on by parenthood, a rite of passage into the adult world that they are deemed not yet ready to face. In turn, this abandonment of what it *means* to be an American teenager also reiterates the hegemonic heteronormativity which is naturalizing the strict divide of *adult* and *teenage* discourses and how sexual identity plays a role. Adopting both – adolescence and adult parenthood – would constitute a struggle between relational, yet strongly oppositional and interdependent discourses, a struggle that, within the family myth has no place, as family is both a 'natural', yet incredibly 'fragile' state that has to be protected and

enforced (Weeks 235):

Whitney's grandmother: "Well, you got your little family now. This is what growing up is all about." ("Whitney", *16 and Pregnant*)

This discourse of infantilization is hegemonic, as we see Ebony confides in the audience through narration that she feels like Josh is an additional baby to take care of, and Macy tells her friends she felt she was forced to grow up quickly, complaining about Ryan not taking on his share of child caring duties. These parental failures are blamed on the partner's inherent immaturity of taking on responsibilities due to his age. It follows then, that ensuring that teenagers know how much work a baby is – while at the same time making adoption a taboo decision that is not 'natural', and silencing the validity of abortion – unmasks the clearly gendered discourse of child-rearing, which is the 'common-sense', heteronormative consequence of sexuality: Farrah is not only supposed to take care of her baby, but is *expected* to be the main care taker of it, and shoulder all of the responsibility – that '*goes-without-saying*'. As a teenager, of course, she is *also* expected not to be able to fail in the role of a 'proper' mother. Teenage mothers are *meant* to fall short of these simultaneous expectations, their very existence a paradox that bridges two oppositional discourses which constructs a very important divide in American culture: that of minors and adults. Thus, teen sexuality, even more through teen pregnancy, puts the privileged position of adults into question when it comes to sexuality, especially as a naturalized, primary category of identity formation (O'Brien and Szeman 184).

The naturalization of pregnancy, birth and motherhood – and implicitly, sexuality – as a female burden are among most frequent instances of legitimating adult sexuality and parenthood within heteronormativity is achieved through naturalizing that discourse of age as normal and commonsensical. This, too, continuously occurs in *16 and Pregnant's* parent-teenager interactions, despite potential places of subversion when a common-sense obviousness is rather unconvincingly framed within reoccurring sequences of conflict and fights. For instance, despite the depiction of a dysfunctional, tense relationship between Farrah and her mother, the audience sees the bond between mother and child naturalized in the birth scene as Farrah holds her baby for the first time:

Farrah's mother: "Isn't it weird how they know their mother right away?"

Farrah: "She knows I love her."

This interaction, taking place during the almost iconic image of the exhausted mother holding her newborn and lovingly gazing at it, unquestionably works towards naturalizing the bond between mother and child, and by extension being a parent as well, adding it to the list of *adult* maturity which brings the necessary, unspoken responsibility it takes to raise a child. This makes this scene a point where the narrative, together with its textual verisimilitude and emotional intimacy, works hard to 'smooth out' the gaps in the family myth by naturalizing the bond between mother and child, even after showing Farrah struggle with her mother the entire episode. Indeed, Todd identified 'patriarchal structures' in the representation of teenage motherhood in *16 and Pregnant*, further elaborating that

[a]ccording to the series, motherhood takes precedence (or *should*) over all else. The series warns how 'hard' (arguably, the girl's most-oft used description throughout their narrative voice-overs and dialogues with others) motherhood is. In fact, motherhood becomes a monolithic identity and is their *only* identity. Postfeminist culture emerged a narrative about what viable young women *should* be and simultaneously binds them with its single analytic about young womanhood. As a result, girls are othered (and effectively 'doomed') by these conflicting ideological constraints. (Todd 60-61)

Indeed, these ideological and discursive conflicts are perhaps where *16 and Pregnant*'s only access points for subversiveness can be located. Whereas the show's textual 'realist' features are more consistent in making the struggle seem like a perfectly natural, common-sense consequence of teenagers engaging in too-early sexuality, *16 and Pregnant* appears to be less consistent on the level of relational dynamics. The instances which might disturb a unified, rational narrative are few and far between, and are less about polysemy and more about disrupting the common-sensical obviousness of 'teenagerness', adulthood, teenage sexuality and parenthood: for instance, as I have already discussed, Farrah expressing no regrets at the end of her episode, Whitney telling her mother she does not wish to have waited with getting pregnant, and Tyler openly humiliating his father over his childhood not having been 'good enough' when confronted about the decision to place his and Catelynn's baby for adoption ("Catelynn", *16 and Pregnant*).

The latter was focused on prominently within Catelynn's episode, as it featured the only adoption in the show's first season. Tyler's father Butch starts up an argument over Catelynn and

Tyler wanting to go through with the adoption again and voices his opinion that a baby should grow up with its '*natural*' parents', to which Catelynn and Tyler respond that an emotionally stable household is decidedly better. Tyler further explains that '*this*' – how he and Catelynn grew up – is 'not good enough for his kid' ("Catelynn", *16 and Pregnant*). Butch responds that 'all a baby needs is love', but Tyler openly and aggressively disagrees. This heated exchange stands out within the show's attempt to naturalize parenthood and the family myth most clearly because of the visibility of the struggle. In an effort to maintain adult, parental control over their children, both Tyler's father and Catelynn's mother repeatedly express that they should keep the child as it is the 'right' and 'natural' thing to do, while the teenage couple openly and aggressively argue against keeping their baby. That Catelynn and Tyler's parents are against the adoption, while, at the same time, Catelynn discusses with her friend – and not her parents – her reasons for opting for adoption, is once again a textual focus and discursive shift of power from parental control to teenage authority. Still, although this and other instances are never are given the chance to be subversive – as I will show, the episodes always end on the conclusion of warning other teenage girls not to get pregnant – they still offer points of oppositional readings for the audience.

3.6.2. Relational talk – Teenage narrators and their teenage audience

The teenage narrator-teenage audience relational dynamic needs to be given detailed attention when it comes to understanding potentially emergent discourses that shape teenage sexuality and its shift from adult to teenage authority. After all, *16 and Pregnant*'s creator pointed out how the program was intended to lend a voice to unheard pregnant teenage girls (Dolgen), an intention which, presumably, has the potential for destabilizing dominant discourse on *adult* sexuality in favor of creating new, critical and socially acceptable, teenage lifestyles. Granting teenagers such highly visible authority to tell their own stories instead of disallowing or further introducing adult policing of teenage sexuality through parental authority should be understood as part of this shift towards seemingly equal peers shaping and creating – or reiterating – the possible limits of teenage sexuality. Notably, this dynamic has been observed when the social category of teenagers emerged in the U. S. of the 1950s and resulted in the reshaping of such social practices as 'making out' and 'dating' (D'Emilio and Freedman 258). Certainly, imbuing teenagers with this discursive power over their own sexuality – or at the very least, creating such an *impression* – is all the more powerful mainly *because* of how authentically, intimately

and emotionally truthful *16 and Pregnant* is representing its narratives, especially through the textualities of narration and POV.

As mentioned previously, narration, emotionally contrastive editing, as well as POV, are the main textualities used to encourage the audience to most seamlessly assume the subject position of the teenage girl in each episode of *16 and Pregnant*. Now, these textualities come together as the show's means to address the audience, additionally to the voice-over narration being provided by the teenage girl. How teenage sexuality is articulated within the seemingly equal, yet unequally weighted relationship of the teenage-narrator and the teenage-audience will be explored in the rest of the analysis, particularly looking out for reiterations and points of subversion, or ripples in the stream of discourse which could denote a new, emergent discourse on teenage sexuality.

Further, taking this approach of looking at the relational dynamics of discourses within *16 and Pregnant* helps this analysis avoid paying closer attention to the more visible and highly mediated and historicized, yet repressive influence of religious and politically conservative discourse which is so prominently featured in debates about teenage sexuality, abortion and whether introducing comprehensive sexual education instead of abstinence only education at school is a viable preventative measure of curbing teenage and unwanted pregnancies (D'Emilio and Freedman 345, Furstenberg 74). *16 and Pregnant*, however, barely relies on religious discourse when constructing representations of teenage sexuality, and should be by no means considered among the most generative, or positively *creative* ones in the Foucauldian sense, when considering which discourses are most powerfully shaping teenage sexuality.

Rather, I will focus on further analyzing how *16 and Pregnant's* preferred reading position, which I have already started on a textual level: through the show's generic verisimilitude, its narrow, gendered and teenage POV, as well as its emotionally contrastive editing, the audience is already 'being drawn' into the subject position of the pregnant, teenage girl (Fiske 11). These textualities urge the audience to make sense of the program in the same way the teenage girl is represented to make sense of her experiences, which in turn means that

we are maintaining and legitimating the dominant ideology, and our reward for this is the easy pleasure of the recognition of the familiar and of its adequacy. We have already become a 'reading subject' constructed by the text, and according to Althusser (1971), the construction of subjects-in-ideology is the major practice in capitalist societies. (Fiske 11-12)

Here, Fiske is describing what Hall would call a 'preferred' or 'dominant reading position' (O'Brien and Szeman 90), which, to Fiske, would be the easiest, and almost most encouraged way to read a text in order to make sense of it, which necessarily results in pleasure through recognizing the familiar, culturally dominant ways of knowing (Fiske 12). This is especially applicable to realistic texts, as we tend to make sense of them in the “same broad ideological frame as the way we make sense of our social experience in the industrialized west [...] and both involve the way we make sense of ourselves, or rather, the way we are made sense of by the discourse of our culture” (Fiske 24-25). Even then, TV programs do not have an 'effect' or impose a certain reality, rather they encourage certain reading positions over others as they offer a “socially located position that it invited the viewer to occupy in order to understand it easily and unproblematically” (Fiske 25).

How successful a TV text is in its effectivity – as opposed to having a measurable, causal and behavioral 'effect' – is a question textual and ideological discourse analysis is equipped to answer (Fiske 20). More importantly, discourses help “make a particular pattern of sense of gender in the family, in the workplace, in school, in social clubs – in fact, in our general social relations” (Fiske 15), both within and outside of a TV text. This would lead my analysis closer to evaluating *16 and Pregnant's* role within the stream of discourse on teenage sexuality without dismissing or overestimating its influence. As I will show, *16 and Pregnant's* representations of teenage sexuality will further narrow down to present the heteronormative consequences of sexuality – pregnancy and raising a child – in deeply private, individualized terms that are emotionally evocative when delimiting possible meanings of sexuality in respect to the discursive divide between adolescence and adulthood.

In connection to this, I will once again take up the concept of governmentality in connection to individualization – as opposed to historically dominant discourses on sexuality such as medicine, religion, psychology and law – when it comes to 'managing subjects' and their sexuality (O'Brien and Szeman 63). As mentioned in the sections discussing RTV and its ideological implications, Todd points out the connections between *16 and Pregnant* and individualization when stating that teenage pregnancy is primarily seen as problematic as it “creates a rupture in the already slippery transition from adolescence to adulthood and is presented as a threat to the teenage mothers' 'project of self’” (Todd 36). Here, she relies on the

theoretical works of Beck and Giddens where she places anxieties surrounding teenage sexuality and pregnancy in the context of a societal “process of 'individualization', in which the construction of subjectivities is privileged through self-monitoring and choice” (ibid.), which is indeed how *16 and Pregnant's* textualities, as well as discourses of naturalization of age and sexuality, treat teenage pregnancy: a mistake that has been made and now must be struggled with. How *16 and Pregnant's* teenage girls relate their struggles in terms of individualization to their teenage audience will be discussed in the rest of the chapter.

3.6.2.1. Teenage authority: lending the 'harsh truth' a voice

As previously established, the use of voice-over narration in documentary and RTV genres holds a position of power, authenticity and authority. Without intending to problematize *how* authentic these narrative voices are in *16 and Pregnant*, it is pertinent to reiterate for my analysis that the narration is not provided by an adult – a parent, a teacher, the creator of the show, or an anonymous narrator – which shifts the usually adult authority over onto teenagers themselves, creating the impression of them presenting their own story, in their words. Each teenage girl herself narrates her own episode, giving the impression of seamlessly relating her story directly to the audience, narrating and reflecting upon scenes. Additionally to lending credence to the narratives *16 and Pregnant* presents, it further helps to create a relationship between the teenage-narrator and the target audience, which, given the network, genre and topic – as well as the transparent pedagogical intentions of Dolgen – consists of primarily other teenagers.

However, *because* of the teenage narrator's in-between position as a soon to be teenage mother, the relational dynamic between narrator and audience must be understood as an unequally weighted relationship as well. Similarly to the adult parent-teenage child dynamic, the pregnant teenage girl holds a position of power over its teenage audience through her experience that lies outside the teenage-norm, and is therefore able to educate other teens through telling her story. It follows then, that while the teenage girl does not hold the same kind of authority as an adult would, she is still in the position of the expert-narrator, with her audience receiving her expert advice. This is noteworthy, because, despite the expert and non-expert relation, both narrator and audience are still situated within the discursiveness of

adolescence. Therefore, the narrator in *16 and Pregnant* inhabits multiple, conflicting subject positions, all at the same time, within certain, relational dynamics.

The impossible struggle with a 'harsh truth'

When reviewing the entire first season, it is notable that the narrators spend most of their narration highlighting the changes in their lives which were brought about by teenage pregnancy. On top of adolescence already being configured as an in-between, pre-adult discursive space, there is now *additional* emphasis on tumultuous change which is embedded within the textualities of *16 and Pregnant's* timespan and editing, and is therefore further reiterating the division between the discursive limits of being a *teenager* and an *adult*. The following sections will analyze in which language is used to articulate underlying discourses.

Almost each episode's introductory narration end with how the teenage girls' lives are going to be turned upside down from now on, which is exemplified in Farrah saying, "Even though I'm still a size two, I won't be for long, because I'm pregnant" ("Farrah", *16 and Pregnant*). Further, at the very beginning of Ebony's episode, her introductory narration ends with the camera slowly panning down to show her pregnant belly in a profile view, right in front of her school locker which she closes while narrating, "Everything hangs in the air, because I'm pregnant" ("Ebony", *16 and Pregnant*). In almost what could be argued is a seamless continuation of the *parenthood-is-hard* discourse already established within the parent-teenager relational dynamic, a majority of the narrative commentary has the teenage girls drawing comparisons between teenage and adult life as a parent, never failing to emphasize the dramatic change of lifestyle their pregnancies have brought about. Farrah points out that, "Four months ago, my biggest worry was what I was going to wear to prom. And now I have the most important decision of my life to make," continuing to say that, "When I thought about pulling an all-nighter for my senior-year, I thought parties, prom or cramming for finals. But now, it means something totally different" ("Farrah", *16 and Pregnant*). Ebony, likewise, points out in a scene where she is distraught and is in tears over how she looks in her prom dress, "First the air force, now the prom? This pregnancy is getting in the way of everything" ("Ebony", *16 and Pregnant*). Both these teenage girls, as well as the rest, emphatically restate their *supposed* teenage existence, which is being forcefully disrupted by teenage pregnancy.

These observations are placed throughout the episode towards the end of segments, and

are never longer than a single sentence, mostly drawing conclusions after a struggle or change brought on by the pregnancy. They are drawing a clear divide between teenage duties – studying, prom, worrying about dress sizes – and the duties that are now unexpectedly on the horizon. The severity and shock of this change is not hidden, but rather ceaselessly emphasized upon, making the discursive path laid out for teenagers seem suddenly and irrevocably disrupted, a part of their lives they will be missing out on, and must be grieved as if their teenage years are forever lost to impending adulthood (Jackson 232). By comparison, their early onset adulthood is the part of their lives that is marked as somehow *worse*, not because that might be the case, but because teenagers are not *meant* to do or say what adults are doing or saying. Whitney is the most transparent example of how adolescence is represented as *positive* and desirable over parenthood – but only because she is 'too young' for the latter. She points out to her doctor that her mother still ties her shoes, a statement that clearly dumbfounds the doctor. When Whitney is now expected to help with dinner – as she is soon going to cook for her own family – she does not want to and narrates, “Yes, I've been babied my whole life, but who wants to grow up? I wanna have fun while I still can, so Weston is taking me out to a big event in town: fight night” (“Whitney”, *16 and Pregnant*).

These scenes of starkly contrasting adult and teenage life become even clearer when, along with pointing out the change of lifestyle between teenagers and adults, the teenage girls are pointing out the differences in their lives and the lives of their peers. After Maci's graduation, she narrates that, “While my friends stay out to celebrate, I have to take Bentley [her baby] home. And sometimes it feels like I'm taking care of two babies” (“Maci”, *16 and Pregnant*), drawing a clear distinction between the teenage and adult lifestyle while at the same time mourning the loss of her 'teenagerness'. Moreover, hinting at relationship troubles, as well as the unwillingness of her partner to take on a share of the child care duties, her narration makes it clear that she would prefer the teenage path over the adult responsibilities of parenthood. Amber, too, is telling her audience what she *should* be doing instead of the responsibilities she *has* to fulfill when she narrates that, “While most kids are shopping for back to school stuff, Gary and I are at the library researching baby names,” and pointing out that, “While other kids are studying for their finals, Gary and I enrolled in Baby 101” (“Amber”, *16 and Pregnant*). Whitney and Catelynn appear to be exceptions, as Whitney dropped out of school for carrying her pregnancy to term, and Catelynn is opting for adoption.

The other sizable portion of narration is taken up by the 'confessional' scenes towards the end, and cover similar points, although in a continuous monologue reflecting upon their experiences the audience has seen in the episode. A pattern can be established which, despite each girls' individual experience, is repeated throughout the first season. Firstly, pregnancy and all its consequences are identified as the cause of the drastic, life altering change. While Farrah is the only teenage girl that talks about this in a positive hopeful tone, when she tells the camera,

She's [her daughter] made me a better person. I'm changing, I'm more independent. I need to learn things for myself. I wanna be the mom that will teach her to love the right way, teach her to know what a good relationship, a bad relationship...I wanna teach her all the right things, so it'll help her out in her life. [...]. ("Farrah", *16 and Pregnant*)

What Amber voices is more in line with the rest of the episodes, as she ponders out loud how her "whole life has changed now that I'm responsible for this child" ("Amber", *16 and Pregnant*). Ebony also treats this with caution, as she lets the audience know that getting "pregnant has changed my view of life. You have to think about somebody else before you think about yourself" ("Ebony", *16 and Pregnant*).

Secondly, the uncertain future brought on by this abrupt change through pregnancy is voiced most often. Again, with Farrah remaining the hopeful exception, Amber comes closer to the kind of emotional anxiety that is intricately woven into *16 and Pregnant's* textuality and representations of teenage sexuality when she tells the audience facing the: "In my head, I have many unanswered questions. Like, will Gary and I actually get married? Will we have more kids?" ("Amber", *16 and Pregnant*). Ebony emphasizes that being on her own is what is worrying her the most, and that the transition from being teenagers – and being taken care of – to taking care of an infant feels like being "out in the ocean by ourselves, out in the big wide world, all by ourselves" ("Ebony", *16 and Pregnant*). Finally, Whitney voices teenage fears that seem complicated by her pregnancy when she worries about "how am I going to get my G. E. D. and start college? How are we gonna be a real family instead of depending on others?" ("Whitney", *16 and Pregnant*), reaffirming the disruption in her teenage life.

It follows that in the face of the uncertain future, the teenage narrators emphasize how they will attempt to rise to the challenge of parenthood, but always keeping the focus on how much of a struggle it will be *because* of their age. Even Farrah, arguably providing the most

positive outlook, notes how her situation is not what she wants it to be: “Fortunately, my family is behind me, even though we're not the greatest family ever. But we still have love. I think it's important to find the right male figure to be in your baby's life. [...] I'm changing, I'm more independent. I need to learn things for myself.” (“Farrah”, *16 and Pregnant*). Amber similarly, although in an increasingly worried tone, tells the audience:

What a long road this has been. Never in a million years could I have foreseen what having a baby would really be like. [...] While Gary and I have our disagreements, and being parents is a challenge, we do our best to spread the love. And Gary never ceases to surprise me with his random acts of sweetness. [...] Will we ever be able to make ends meet? Or buy our own home? (“Amber”, *16 and Pregnant*)

Amber, apart from Whitney, is the only girl voicing financial worries along with uncertainties over her relationship and whether parenthood is a challenge she can face successfully, however with “a singular focus on the individual, the question of the economic situation of the young mother and its influence on her decision to carry her baby to term is left unanswered” (Tally 215). Facing this challenge alone – without her parents and Josh – is what is worrying Ebony the most, although she finds solace in being “more self-reliant than Josh [...]”. When I think about Josh leaving for the air force, it's hard for me to be apart from him for very long, but it's better for the baby's future, so that we can actually start our lives together” (“Ebony”, *16 and Pregnant*).

Finally, most confessional scenes end with a reminder that '*it-could-happen-to-you*', extending the anxiety and sense of uncertainty over onto the teenage audience when Amber reminds viewers that she could have never foreseen what it was like, along with Whitney outright stating that she “didn't think I was the type to get pregnant at a young age. When I'm done, I'm really overwhelmed and wonder how did this happen to me?” (“Whitney”, *16 and Pregnant*). All these monologues lead into the conclusions that *16 and Pregnant* seemingly intends to want to arrive at when representing teenage sexuality in such a way that it would help prevent teenage pregnancy. Amber asks herself in her confessional, “Am I just too young to handle all of this?”, once again firmly validating the hegemonic, discursive divide of adolescence and adulthood in her own narrative voice.

That the struggle between *teenage* and *adulthood* will eventually have to resolve itself with the teenage parent 'growing up quickly' is what Ebony has already accepted in her

confessional scene:

I'm more self-reliant than Josh is, I'm okay with being the adult in the relationship. I feel like I've given up a lot more than Josh has. I mean, I had to sacrifice graduating, I sacrificed going into the air force, and actually being a teenager. I grew up and I know he'll grow up somewhat, but I don't think he'll ever lose the child, I think he'll always be childish in some way. ("Ebony", *16 and Pregnant*)

Giving up 'actually being' a teenager, graduation, as well as a career, in order to be the 'adult' in the relationship, Ebony both mourns her own adolescence, while lamenting that her partner still is within the discursive space she felt so compelled to abandon. The fact that the teens themselves see this as a sacrifice and as a *missing out* on being a teenagers further uncovers the naturalized and interpellated discourse of age, as well as its subject position. Despite *16 and Pregnant*'s first season having six different teenage pregnancy narratives on offer, all provided by a diverse group of teenage girls, they seem to come to the same conclusion: 'If you are getting pregnant too young, you are missing out on what you are supposed to be at that age'.

Whitney's confessional scene is notable in connection to this, because it is in the only instance in season one where the teenage girl openly accepts her inability to '*grow up quickly*' and is entirely reliant on her older partner for childcare and household duties:

"The truth is, having a baby is more than I can handle at that age, so I have to rely on Weston to do a lot. My teenage years feel like they're just gone now. [...] Ten months ago, I was still the baby of the family. Some days I just feel like I'm never gonna grow up and I would *hate* to, but I will grow up for him." ("Whitney", *16 and Pregnant*)

This puts her confessional scene on the polar opposite of Farrah confidently stating that "that I went through I would not take any of that back" ("Farrah", *16 and Pregnant*), providing for some variety within the struggles and failures of teenage parenthood.

3.6.2.2. Motherhood as an *exhausting*, aged responsibility

To further investigate the discourses that are related on the teenage expert narrator – teenage audience level, I am going to explore how the teenage girls narrate the abrupt, inescapable change that pregnancy has caused in their lives. In reviewing this, it is worth noting that in *16*

and *Pregnant*'s first season, there are a variety of teenage voices, despite the pattern of evoking a sense of dreadful and helpless anxiety and insecurity over their future. Parenthood might seem hard and difficult on its own, but teenage parenthood has an underlying sense of helplessness which is captured in the phrase 'babies having babies' (Friedman 68); they're simply not ready, and because this unpreparedness is due to their naturalized age, there is seemingly nothing they can do to overcome it.

While Farrah is the only one in the first season to see her insecure future as something she can seize to improve herself – admitting in her confessional scene that being a teen mom isn't easy, mainly because “when I wanna be independent about something, it might be hard for my mom to deal with that” (“Farrah”, *16 and Pregnant*) – the rest of the teenage girls are shown and narrating this sense of helplessness, saying they're not ready to have a baby yet:

Maci: “There's no going back now! Bentley's on his way, whether we're ready or not. [...] I wasn't ready either but I grew up because I had to.” (“Maci”, *16 and Pregnant*)

Whitney: “We're definitely not ready for this baby, but it's coming, whether we're ready or not.” (“Whitney”, *16 and Pregnant*)

Catelynn: “Getting pregnant at 16, I really wasn't ready for it. It made me wanna make my life better, go to college, get an education” (“Catelynn”, *16 and Pregnant*)

This recurring pattern of *not-being-ready* echoes the teenage girl's urge to '*grow up quickly*' in order to handle something they are not *meant* to handle. These excerpts from of various episodes are important to this analysis exactly because they constitute a formulaic part of the show which is featured in almost all of the episodes. It repeatedly highlights the unceasing feeling of being unprepared in the face of a life-changing event – the birth, and then, the responsibilities of raising a child – which is exasperated when Catelynn expresses that it 'doesn't matter' whether Tyler and her are ready for the baby (“Catelynn”, *16 and Pregnant*).

This recurring representation of teenage pregnancy and sexuality through helplessness is intertwined with the discursive strategy of '*growing-up-quickly*', which I have discussed in a previous section. Arguably, teenagers are *supposed* to be helpless in these situations, as they are not discursively expected to face parenthood and childbirth. Echoing this helplessness in the teenage girls' narration is what reaffirms a teenager who is neither ready nor able to face what

heteronormativity expects adults to face, namely childbirth and child care. The highlighting of teenagers struggling to rise to the markedly adult challenge of parenthood, and subsequently emphasizing themselves that they are unable is, once again, a point where the dominant, adult discourse of heteronormative parenthood, as well as the discursive divide between adulthood and adolescence is reaffirmed by the teenagers themselves, after the previous, continuous infantilization by their parents.

Maci's narration is the clearest example of this. Due to her role as a teenage mother, Maci feels compelled that she *has* to grow up, even though she herself says she was not ready for it. She realizes this and is ready to shoulder most responsibilities (Todd 36). In order to accomplish this, she has to stop being a teen and *grow up*, which reiterates that responsibility and parenthood is exclusively for adults. In turn, due to the gendered burden of taking on the responsibilities of childcare, her unsupportive partner Ryan is infantilized in not having grown up and not showing the urge to take on the adult responsibilities of a father. Although Maci is upset that she has to effectively raise Bentley on her own, she is still reluctant to tell Ryan to also take care of his child out of fear of not keeping him happy, telling her mother that she is ready to take the responsibility 'for both of us' ("Maci", *16 and Pregnant*). Even Catelynn, who does not keep her baby, is in line with this feeling of anxiety and justifies her urge to place her baby for adoption with the same feeling of not being ready, a feeling of disbelief and insurmountable helplessness that extends into her birth:

It doesn't matter how ready we are, because ready or not, this baby is coming. [...] I can't believe I'm on my way to the hospital to be induced and that I'm going to give birth sometime today. I've been through so much already, and I still feel totally unprepared. ("Catelynn", *16 and Pregnant*)

As I have argued in previous sections, having to deal with this extreme, life-altering change as a teenager is marked discursively as *worse* than '*staying-teen*', although it is never elaborated upon. Notwithstanding, the teenage girls remind the audience that they're doing the best they can, even though it results in more of a struggle and mourning for the loss of their teenage years than a rise to meet the challenge of parenthood. Maci reiterates that they "have a lot to handle, and that at only sixteen!" ("Maci", *16 and Pregnant*), and that she realizes that it's "not perfect, but we're doing the best we can" ("Maci", *16 and Pregnant*). Similarly to Ebony, she mourns the loss of her social life, stating that her "high school years are officially over", as

her baby takes priority over *being a teenager*, two lifestyles that are discursively and mutually exclusive. Amber narrates that she never wanted kids and she was a party girl, “but that life is ancient history” (“Amber”, *16 and Pregnant*).

The major focal point of this struggle is that parenting is hard, difficult, and now *exhausting*, as Farrah narrates:

I was so excited when we got Sofia home, but I had no idea it was going to be this much work. My mom was right, it's exhausting. Over the past few days, everything has been about Sofia. I'm starting to wonder whether I'm going to get any sleep at all. (“Farrah”, *16 and Pregnant*)

Similarly, Amber, and Gary who is stretched thin working overtime “are on the verge of losing it” (“Amber”, *16 and Pregnant*) due to the constant cleaning up and lack of sleep. Not much later in the episode, Amber narrates, “Let me tell you, this parenting thing is not easy, but then again, nobody said it would be” (“Amber”, *16 and Pregnant*), which, similarly to Farrah's point, highlights their inability to cope with the duties and responsibilities of parenting, while at the same time having them reinforce their parents' authority when they told them they would be struggling.

It is crucial to reiterate that, in concert with quick cuts and editing, as well as the textualities of condensing time and casual deletion, *16 and Pregnant* very often emphasizes the struggles and failures and conflicts of teenage parenting; it is recurring in Maci and Ryan's relationship slipping away into quiet resentment, Josh and his mother's fights, Amber's and Gary's families not seeing eye to eye. This is worth noting in contrast to the rare glimpses of happiness the audience is presented with in the show's emotionally juxtapositioned editing. However, the most noteworthy point is that the overwhelming majority of the highlighted ‘*problems*’ caused by too-early parenthood are not caused by the young age of the parents – quarrels over household chores, who does what, a colic baby's ceaseless crying – as it has been pointed out by critics who said parenting is hard for *anyone*, also adults (Friedman 76). Rather the specialized focus on teenage parental struggles and failures is a logical denouement of the attempt of teenage parents' paradoxical in-between discursiveness. Teenagers are *supposed* to fail when taking on distinctively adult responsibilities, which might be why these representations of teenage pregnancy, parenthood and implicit sexuality are permeated with, and evoking feelings of apprehension, fear, helplessness, anxiety and insecurity in both teenage

girls and the audience (Thomas 119).

Commonly, voice-over narration is characteristic of setting an 'authoritative tone' over the visual images of a documentary, guiding as well as pre-interpreting what is shown to the audience (Bignell 222). Whitney is especially open about her struggle when she narrates that, "Going to the mall [with her baby] was never this much work," and that she "can't believe changing a diaper is this much work" ("Whitney", *16 and Pregnant*). However, as Whitney exemplifies most narration of the first season, it has to be mentioned that almost all of *16 and Pregnant*'s voice-overs are highlighting struggles, failures and anxiety inducing events, endowing the representations of teenage parenthood with a decidedly fearful sense of disempowerment, which falls in line with the common, emotionally permeated underpinnings of teenage representations on TV (Baxter 126). Whitney, and others, have highlighted how they cannot rise to meet the challenges of parenthood, or are at the very least struggling with it in inconceivable ways. In relentlessly emphasizing how overwhelming, painful, exhausting parenthood is and how unprepared they are for it, rather than, say, also featuring child developmental milestones or quiet, happy family moments, teenagers themselves represent their own subject-position in "abnormal", "stereotyped", "problematic", "infantile" way which is "absent of heteronormativity" (Thomas 120). This representation is incredibly powerful, as together with its 'authentic', teenage perspective which qualifies the teenage narrator's 'authoritative' position as something closer to a cautionary tale, rather than an example other teens should follow. This point is reiterated when Whitney narrates that she tries "hard, but I can't do it without help from my family. Having a baby is exhausting and I haven't had any time for my friends" ("Whitney", *16 and Pregnant*).

Additionally to the struggle of parenting, the social stigma the teenage narrators experience at school is often related and commented on through narration, also framing the reactions to teenage pregnancy as deeply personal. This is evidenced in Farrah going so far as to wanting her pregnancy to be a secret, which does not work out in the end: "People are talking, and it seems like the whole school knows" ("Farrah", *16 and Pregnant*). Contrasting Farrah's negative experience with the social stigma of teenage pregnancy, Ebony narrates: "At school, some kids are excited about my pregnancy, but other kids just aren't as cool with it" ("Ebony", *16 and Pregnant*). Just *how* her peers have a now changed perception of Ebony is covered further when her class takes a moment to discuss teenage pregnancy. A male class mate

tells about his own sister and how her early pregnancy ruined her life, which leads Ebony to explain that, while not planned, she wants to have the baby, saying 'there's a reason for everything' ("Ebony", *16 and Pregnant*). The discussion takes a turn for the worse when another male class mate says: "If girls have no respect for themselves...I'm not saying you have no respect for yourself if you're having sex, but, you know, just keep your legs closed" ("Ebony", *16 and Pregnant*). The scene ends on Ebony, showing her displeased reaction to this comment. Even when her school organizes a special class where pregnant teenage girls are brought into contact with teenage moms, she tells the audience that, "These girls are freaking me out, I thought this was supposed to make me feel better!" ("Ebony", *16 and Pregnant*). This sort of support – from both her school, educators, her mother and other teen moms – stands alone in the first season. Except for the few negative reactions from her classmates, Ebony is not nearly as stigmatized or ostracized as Farrah or Whitney, although she still had to give up graduating herself because her fiancé had to graduate in order to provide for them, making her the sole care taker of their child.

Finally, Whitney once again provides the audience with the starkest reiteration of the social stigmatization of teenage pregnancy when she tells the audience:

When I found out I was pregnant, I was embarrassed and afraid of what people think about me, so I dropped out of high school. I hoped to get my G. E. D. and still go to college, but now I've been pregnant six months and barely leave the house. I even stopped hanging out with my friends because I don't want people to see me. ("Whitney", *16 and Pregnant*)

This particular excerpt is voiced over a cartoon-diary segment of Whitney at school and fellow students laughing and pointing at her with speech bubbles, reading 'She's pregnant!', 'Slut!' and 'Whore!'. While this is obviously not a retelling of what actually happened to Whitney – she dropped out of school before her pregnancy became known – it is still worth pointing out that this fear and sense of shame, although never actually experienced, sits so strongly in Whitney's mind that she resorts to hiding away at home while carrying her pregnancy to term.

A last, noteworthy kind of struggle that is embedded within these representations of teenage pregnancy and sexuality is that of pain. If the responsibilities of parenthood are inconceivably *hard*, then the pain of childbirth is unfathomable. The narration during the birth scenes culminate in the emphasis of pain; when Maci narrates her birth as "the hardest thing

I've ever done. I kicked and screamed for over thirty hours of non-stop pain until finally..." ("Maci", *16 and Pregnant*), it is important to note *how* her pain and struggle is transferred onto the audience, positioning them to not just empathize with Maci's pain, but to envision it for themselves through the textualities of POV, as well as narration. This is noteworthy especially because of the teenage target audience which, it has to be assumed, for the majority, has not experienced child birth yet. Farrah narrating that she is "in so much pain, it is time for the epidural" ("Farrah", *16 and Pregnant*), and Amber conceding that she "knew that delivering a baby would hurt, but I'd never imagine to be in this much pain. They do *not* teach you this in high school" ("Amber", *16 and Pregnant*), they are more than just relating the painful reality of giving birth. They are reiterating this rather obvious fact over and over *because* it is the "the worst pain I've ever felt" ("Whitney", *16 and Pregnant*), a statement that, related to the relative pain average teenage girls can relate to, will invoke a fear of something unfathomably painful. Additionally to the inability of facing the adult responsibilities of parenthood, the pain of childbirth – which, for adult women, is something to bear – is reaffirmed as scary, unbelievable and horrifying within the discursiveness of adolescence. Whitney especially seems to be overwhelmed with the pain, as she tells her audience that, after prolonged labor and a subsequent c-section, she never has "been in so much pain in my life. A c-section is major surgery, and I have 8 staples in my belly" ("Whitney", *16 and Pregnant*).

3.6.2.3. A teen mom 'having it all': high school, raising a child, college, work, relationships...

Despite the impossible struggle of teenage parenthood, seemingly overwhelming responsibilities, crumbling family relationships, stigmatization from peers, the unfathomable pain of childbirth, *16 and Pregnant's* teenage mothers are shown to attempt to complete high school, go to college, as well as maintain their existing relationships throughout the episodes. Even though the audience sees various relationship constellations within the first season of *16 and Pregnant*, the teenage narrators reiterate that gaining support from their partners' is rare and most often hard won. The teenage fathers' lack of enthusiasm to take on child care duties is highlighted most often, even though at least two fathers are taking on the majority of chores and child care responsibilities, in which instances it is pointed out by the teenage mother how *lucky* she is to have a partner like that.

Contrastingly, the rest of the featured teenage mothers either have no partner present, or narrate that the amount of support they do get is not sufficient, resulting in a largely “negative representation” of teenage fatherhood (McClanahan 146). Interestingly, this disruption of the heterosexual imaginary appears to be the only other point of subversion to be found in *16 and Pregnant*, as

the images shown throughout *16 and Pregnant* and *Teen Mom* of teen fathers are largely negative – especially when they are paired with the mothers of their children. These images directly contradict the belief that a heterosexual relationship is the path to a happy life. Furthermore, the belief that having a nuclear family – mother, father, biological child (or children) – should be the ultimate goal in life is problematized through the representations of fathers in *16 and Pregnant* and *Teen Mom*. (McClanahan 146)

Therefore, it could be argued that the representation of struggling, and supposedly failing relationships striving for the heterosexual imaginary somehow disrupts the validity of heteronormativity. However, in relation to the naturalized age discourse on teenage sexuality, it has to be restated that the failing of these relationships could be viewed as almost anticipatory, as “maintaining unwavering relationships lies outside of the 'teen norm'” (Baxter 127). In this sense, I would argue that the struggle of teenage relationships is eventually reiterating the pre-adult, emotionally permeated, discursive space of teenage sexuality.

Indeed, the relationships are shown to be continuously tested with the stress of taking on child care responsibilities and household chores, most visibly with Maci who simply states that “Ryan's attitude sucks” (“Maci”, *16 and Pregnant*). Despite them living in their own apartment, Ryan having a steady job, and Maci enrolling into college, she voices her frustrations that Ryan is not interested in talking about anything baby related. “I know Ryan is dreading this baby, but would it kill him to be supportive?”, is what she narrates over scenes of Ryan at their apartment, bored and arranging nights out with his friends. Ryan's evasiveness when it comes to taking care of his baby is again highlighted when they're attending their graduation and he fails to change his baby's diaper, with Maci telling the audience that, “It didn't take long for Ryan to find a way to make me change Bentley's diaper. They don't even have a changing table in here.”

These seemingly minor relationship problems are highlighted because they center around another level of struggle that teenage parenthood will have to face, namely, the coupled trepidation of leading a successful relationship with a partner while also raising a child.

If a balance between the two is hard to both achieve and maintain for adults, then teenage couples are under even higher pressure due to the discursive supposition of failure. Additionally, the emphasis on this struggle through the teenage girl's perspective, supplemented by the narration, not only frames but individualizes the struggling and failing relationships; Maci and Ryan seem to be failing as a couple and parents not because of gendered domesticity, pervading negative representations of fatherhood, and the expectation of the teenage girl to be a mother before anything else, but rather because of Maci and Ryan's age. Fallas echoes this in her analysis of *16 and Pregnant*'s representation of teenage motherhood when she says that

motherhood takes precedence (or *should*) over all else. The series warns how 'hard (arguably, the girl's most-oft used description throughout their narrative voice-overs and dialogues with others) motherhood is. In fact, motherhood become a monolithic identity and is their *only* identity. (Fallas 60-61)

This observation is echoed in Tally's critique when she states that, additionally to the naturalizing, monolithic identity of motherhood, *16 and Pregnant*'s individualizing and emotional textualities render "the questions of who is getting pregnant and why [...] lost, and the connection between teen motherhood and poverty are erased; instead, blame is cast on the young women, who are demonized for being sexually loose and having gotten themselves 'into trouble' by making poor choices" (209).

Arguably, the narrow focus on teenage pregnancy as a personally made mistake – that now must be payed for in anxiety and a fearful anticipation of the future – is intensified in *16 and Pregnant*'s ending 'confessional scenes'. Maci talks to the camera in her confessional scene that

Getting pregnant at sixteen made mine and Ryan's relationship very very difficult. Since I got pregnant at sixteen it's made a lot of things very, very, very hard. For Bentley's sake, we both want to work this out and do the best we can for him. We have to make it work until either it does work out like we hope, or we just realize that we just don't belong together. [...] It's been a lot harder than I thought it would be, staying with him, and I'm sure he thinks the same thing, but we're gonna see how things go. Maybe this summer we'll have our beach wedding that we want, and maybe not.[...] Who knows, today it's good, tomorrow it might fall apart again. We're just working on it, and see what the future has in store for us. ("Maci", *16 and Pregnant*)

While Maci makes her dire relationship status clear – and explicitly identifying the pregnancy

as the reason why it is such a struggle, while, at the same time striving to keep her nuclear family intact for 'Bentley's sake' (Thomas 116) – she, at the same time, hangs onto the hegemonic promise of a 'happily ever after' of the heterosexual imaginary (McClanahan 142). Similarly, Whitney tells the audience that she is glad to have lost her virginity to her first boyfriend, Weston, and already dreams about a 'happily ever after' with him, complete with a big house and a big family, although the comic-diary segment accompanying this narration re-frames these hopes and dreams as a teenage daydream that remains hopeful to the promises of the heterosexual imaginary.

Ebony's situation is similar to Maci's, as her pregnancy has not only taken a toll on her relationship, but also on her hopes of graduating and joining the United States Air Force. Ebony's sacrifices are starkly contrasted with her fiancé Josh almost dropping out of school *and* not taking on his share of child care duties and household chores, which Ebony narrates before confronting Josh by telling the audience, "I had to give up my air force dreams so that Josh could have his. So he better start taking things seriously" ("Ebony", *16 and Pregnant*). Scenes of their prom night are the emotional high point where Ebony seems to be comfortable and content, saying "I could stay like this forever. My fantasy all hinges on one thing: Josh graduating. But the next day, reality set in" ("Ebony", *16 and Pregnant*).

Contrastive editing follows this blissful scene of prom night with a struggle of domesticity, where a heavily pregnant Ebony in the kitchen, cutting to shots of Josh sitting around, waiting for his parents to call him after he left his parental home. Ebony is in fervent hopes that Josh eventually "starts acting like one [a dad] too", yet, narrates her realization that "[n]o matter how hard he tries, he can't seem to get it right" ("Ebony", *16 and Pregnant*). Similarly to Maci, Ebony is ready to, yet also resentful at, having to take on the burden of child care alone and verbalizes this to her friends before wanting to 'upset' her partner with her complaints. She confesses that she is mad because that she had to grow up fast without Josh feeling the same urgency to act *outside* of his teenage subjectivity. Therefore, similarly to Maci, the struggling teenage relationship centers around the teenage father still being a teen, while the teenage mother feels the need to 'grow up' quickly.

It follows, then, that the struggle to maintain relationships is represented in terms of the discourse on age, focusing on the tension of the teenage in-between, pre-adult identity which becomes intensified through teenage mother- and fatherhood. In addition, the discursive tension

this division of adolescence and adulthood – and the struggle to inhabit such oppositional identities simultaneously – causes relationship problems firmly embedded within heteronormativity, its heterosexual imaginary and the myth of the family (McClanahan 142, Weeks 235). Consequently, rather than teenage parents, they are *teenaged* parents. They must conceive of themselves as *grown-up* in order to responsibly and satisfactorily fulfill the parent role, which, as delimited through the narrations, is based on gendered, as well as naturalized expectations teenage mothers feels to a greater extent than teenage fathers. This is how the paradox existence of a 'teen mom' is resolved, while, at the same time, reiterating the markedly *adult* discourse of parenthood and heteronormative sexuality. Even in those rare episodes that close their narrative on a positive note – Amber assures the audience that, “[t]hings mellowed out, and Gary and I settled into a comfortable routine” – rather than teenage mothers reflecting on the struggle they have gone through and the uncertain future they are facing, it is always with the reminder that the future is seemingly out of control and more uncertain for teenage parents.

With the focus on familial, as well as spousal support, should it be there, it is noteworthy that throughout the first season of *16 and Pregnant* institutionalized sources support and of discursive power – such as parenthood facilities, and welfare, governmental or scholarship aid – are never acknowledged or talked about (Lance, A. et al. 292), representing teenage pregnancy in increasingly individualized terms as what Friedman called a “myth of choice” (67). This will be important to keep in mind when I will contrast *16 and Pregnant's* representations of teenage sexuality and pregnancy, and the discourses they rely on with those that inform public debate in current, American cultural history. Whereas *16 and Pregnant* utilizes emotionally evocative textuality to imbue teenage pregnancy with an unyielding sense of anxiety and insecurity, advocates fighting for the prevention of teenage pregnancy routinely voice economic arguments, going as far as saying that teenage pregnancies perpetuate poverty (Bonell 255).

3. 7. *16 and Pregnant's* representations in context to *The National Campaign, StayTeen.org* and current debates over teenage pregnancy and sexual education

As I hope to have shown in my analysis, *16 and Pregnant's* representations of teenage sexuality are permeated with emotions of anxiety, fear, apprehension and insecurity. This might appear a paradoxical, primarily emotional quality for the show's representations of teenage sexuality, as the show's creator has initially and very publicly attested to wanting to 'give a voice' to the unheard group of pregnant teenage girls (Dolgen). Although the show does have potential for empowerment of teenage sexuality, Fallas notes that “the program inevitably returns to a fixed notion of appropriate femaleness through its focus on and responses to prescriptive gender norms” (IX), which *16 and Pregnant's* representations of teenage sexuality are maintaining, rather than attempting to upset heteronormative discourses of age and sexuality.

Indeed, in the rare scenes where teenage sexuality is discussed outside of heteronormative pregnancy and parenthood, contraception is rarely mentioned, and only when failing at preventing a pregnancy (“Catelynn”, *16 and Pregnant*) or in teens failing to use it; abortion is dismissed by teenage girls as a valid option, with no episode discussing or featuring a teenage girl choosing it as an option (Lance et al. 292). That *16 and Pregnant* extensively omits what could be considered sexual health information – with the supposed intention of empowering a teenage audience – and in turns represents teenage pregnancy is a highly individualized and emotionally raw manner is important to note, as I would argue that this constitutes show's discourse on teenage sexuality, where teenage pregnancy and the fear of it stands metonymically for the risk of engaging in adult sexuality. In fact, I would argue, this is indeed the only way *16 and Pregnant*, as a TV show, has proven its effectivity, when indeed “82 percent of teenagers credit the hit show in helping them understand the challenges that come with unexpected parenthood” (Dinh), as well as “research by the National Campaign found that among teens who watch “16 and Pregnant,” 82 percent believe the show helps teens better understand the challenges of teen pregnancy and parenthood and how to avoid it” (Dolgen).

That these anxieties, which are permeating *16 and Pregnant's* representations of teenage

sexuality and pregnancy, are not simply expressed on the content level has been shown throughout my analysis. Rather, right from the very start, these representations of teenage sexuality have been constructed within textualities which were profoundly influential in shaping a discourse that is individualized, private, highly emotionally vulnerable, as well as naturalizing those distinctive features of teenage sexuality as inherent in their pre-adult, incomplete subjectivity. As a result, by effectively silencing a potential teenage sexuality *without* anxiety-inducing consequences of too-early parenthood and painful childbirth, *16 and Pregnant* represents teenage sexuality in firmly dominant discursive ways of *adult* heteronormativity in that they reinforce the division between adulthood and adolescence by strongly tying representations of teenage sexuality to heterosexual and reproductive consequences. Thus, the textually, as well as discursively, narrow focus on a female, teenage POV renders the show a part of reinforcing “dominant narratives of sexuality education associated with 'protecting children and mitigating risk rather than inviting teens to engage in sustained discussion of their sexuality and sexual choices’” (Guglielmo 25).

That *16 and Pregnant* as an RTV format features these representations of fear-inducing representation of teenage sexuality's heteronormative consequences is lending this anxiety and insecurity further authenticity and credence when voicing them through seemingly autobiographical, teenage narratives. This matters because it demarcates a shift of discursive power from the an adult and parent to a teenage authority, which is further emphasized through having RTV, as a genre, feature 'governmentality' as a main operational mechanic when focusing on self-work constructing one's own 'reflexive' subjectivity (Skeggs and Wood 28); this constitutes a form of self-regulation rather than a centralized, institutionalized point of regulatory power, which is a concept that comes close to the Foucault's concept of how power is not coming from a single, dominant point, but from many, diffused and localized places. And yet, the analysis has shown that, despite the shift in discursive power, the infantilizing hegemonic discourse on teenage sexuality can be found within both relational dynamics. This necessarily implies that, instead of generating emergent, possibly unsettling discursive ripples in the stream of dominant heteronormativity and its intimate interdependence with Western discourses of age, these highly visible representations of struggling and failing teenage sexuality work to “normalize this lack of sexual subjectivity for their viewers” (Guglielmo and Stewart 29). It follows, then, that under the guise of empowerment, teenage voices reiterate

their own helplessness and maintain the legitimacy of the discursive divide between adolescence and adulthood through their own autobiographic narratives.

This urges my analytical perspective to look at broader, surrounding discourse on teenage pregnancy and sexuality, while keeping in mind to add TV programs to the list of discursive terrains where “modes of self-regulation [...] have been depicted as important arenas in which ideas about childhood innocence and adult knowledge have been worked out” (Jackson 235). Indeed, when taking into consideration current discussions of teenage pregnancy as an 'epidemic', then the visibility of *16 and Pregnant*'s representations of teenage sexuality can be seen to have helped curb teenage pregnancy rates by disassociating teenage pregnancy as a public health and social problem and instilling the 'problem' with a new sense of urgency that is easily translated into a moral panic; after all, *16 and Pregnant*'s first season has insisted that teen pregnancy can happen to anyone.

This heightened visibility of problematizing teenage pregnancy as an 'epidemic' stands in stark contrast to statistics provided by the CDC's *The National Campaign*, which report that “the nation’s rate of teen pregnancy and parenthood has plummeted over the past two decades” seeing, in fact, a 42% percent decrease in teenage pregnancy since 1990, and yet, they have conducted a survey that found that “56% of those aged 18-34 incorrectly believe the teen pregnancy rate has increased” (“The National Campaign | To Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy”). Without wanting to afford *16 and Pregnant* the power to single-handedly sway national opinions, it is my contention that it evidences TV's “ability to give form and presence to a discursive current and social identity it produced” (Fiske, *Media* 11), as well as the observation that, within our heavily mediated world, separating “media events from nonmedia events” (Fiske, *Media* 1) is an increasing blurry and non-meaningful distinction to make.

In this respect, it should not be overlooked that increased visibility of the 'problem' of teenage pregnancy, with the intention to further prevent it in the future, has indeed at least helped distort the public perception of the *actual* proportions of what has to become dubbed an 'epidemic' (Furstenberg 23) which is, notably, the same rhetoric used for discussing the emerging AIDS crisis three decades ago (D'Emilio and Freedman 359). Thus, TV shows such as *16 and Pregnant*, regardless of their superficial triviality, need to be taken seriously in their role in creating discursive meaning and thus our 'social facts' of life by investigating their textual and discursive underpinnings, even if they do not necessarily create discourses, but rather, are

encouraging the audience to reject or promote certain discourses over others.

Similarly to *16 and Pregnant*, advocates which are fighting to curb teenage pregnancy are feminizing the governmentality of sexuality in that they target teenage girls, where

discussions surrounding teen sexuality and sex education programs offer two versions of teen girlhood: a sexually naïve innocent – a 'pure' and ideally submissive young woman who pledges her virginity to her father in a purity ball, perhaps – or a sexually experienced corrupting slut. More troubling is that within these running narrative, the authentic voices of young women are noticeably absent or deliberately silenced,' because of 'age and perceived lack of experience'. (Guglielmo and Stewart 19)

Conceiving of comprehensive sex education – or, in other words, making adult knowledge of sexuality accessible to teenagers – as the 'solution' to the teen pregnancy problem should be treated with caution. After all, according to Foucault, the controlling of sexualities does not restrain itself to prohibit certain sexual behavior; rather, it also opens up new categories, as well as new ways of knowing, and therefore new appropriate sexualities, all endowed with their – perhaps compared to certain preceding discourses – new freedoms, but also new limitations (Weeks 7), and might “be just as tight today despite an ostensible 'liberalisation', that power over sexuality is not in the simple form of censorship and denial but in regulation and organisation, and that this takes many forms” (Weeks 9).

The National Campaign is important to note, not simply because its close relation to *16 and Pregnant*, but also because it has greatly helped making teenage pregnancy not just a highly visible problem, but an 'epidemic'. Yet, beyond *The National Campaign's* efforts to prevent teenage pregnancy, it claims that *all* 'unplanned' pregnancies are problematic, and claim that especially “teen pregnancy is closely linked to a host of other critical social issues—poverty and income, overall child well-being, out-of-wedlock births, responsible fatherhood, health issues, education, child welfare, and other risky behavior”, while, at the same time, conceding that even though teenage pregnancy is “a well-recognized problem, the larger challenge of unplanned, unintended pregnancy among non-teens is poorly understood” (“The National Campaign | To Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy”). Throughout its website and statistical surveys, *The National Campaign* is still relying on 'out-of-wedlock' as an indicator of a troubling family constellation, as well as solely focusing on how teenage pregnancy results in negative outcomes for the mother when naming dropping out of high school and not pursuing

tertiary education a problem caused by teenage pregnancy which is a gendered focus on what will supposedly result in intergenerational poverty (“The National Campaign | To Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy”).

StayTeen.org, an affiliated website run by *The National Campaign*, is tailored to provide sexual health information to teenagers. Perhaps unsurprisingly, *StayTeen* also puts teenage pregnancy in strictly gendered terms when solely addressing teenage girls with the fear-inducing statistic that “3 in 10 teen girls the US will get pregnant at least once before age 20? That's more than 700,000 teen pregnancies each year. Yikes” (“Stay Teen | Teen Pregnancy”). While *StayTeen.org* acknowledges that teenagers themselves will ultimately choose whether to engage in sexual activities or not, they still frame the advice given in strictly heterosexual, as well as aged terms by recommending abstinence as “the only 100% effective method of preventing pregnancy and STIs” (“Stay Teen | Teen Pregnancy”), which does not only *not* constitute information on sexual health, but also stresses sexuality in its reproductive consequences, which is evidenced by omitting discussions of desire and masturbation. Even the CDC's teenage sexual health intervention programs mention as their primary goal the communication of an increase of abstinence (Sikkema), which, when compared to information provided adults on how to prevent pregnancy and STIs – which suggests limiting the number of sexual partners, but never abstinence (CDC) – further reinforces the *adult* discursive space of sexuality.

In this light, even comprehensive sex education, as it stands right now, would very much limit teen sexuality in the *new* categories of appropriateness and inappropriateness, just that these categories have shifted from total abstinence to responsible use of contraceptives with a limited number of partners – preferably one – in a romantic, monogamous, heterosexual relationship. It must be noted, then, that comprehensive sex education, as opposed to abstinence, would empower teens, but only in certain ways in favor of others, encouraging certain behaviors over others. Here, the 'positive', generative side of power that opens up new categories and limits teens to new ways of behaving and defining oneself within appropriate or inappropriate categories.

Elaborating upon this seemingly minor criticism is of utmost relevance, as it is still rarely pointed out when discussing the debate of abstinence and comprehensive sex education, which often goes hand in hand with glossing over the multiaxiality of age and sexuality. Only a

few researchers (Furstenberg, Kearny, DasGupta, Furstenberg and Kelly, Rich-Edwards, Scally) have very recently begun to voice criticism in relation to conceiving of comprehensive sex education as a liberating force for teenage sexuality, pointing out that the 'problem' and the solution it inspires is wholly disproportionate. Moreover, a recent study by the University of Maryland indicates that, beyond framing teenage pregnancy as an 'epidemic',

focusing on teen pregnancies as unintended could be misleading [...]. You look at the girls who had a baby and reported it was unintended – many of them were not using any form of contraception. They weren't actively trying to have a baby, but they weren't actively *not* trying to have a baby... If a girl is ambivalent about getting pregnant, then giving her a sex-ed class, won't solve the problem. (Gee)

Related to this, Rich-Edwards writes that “it appears that the life trajectories of teen mothers are little altered by becoming mothers in their teens” and therefore calls teenage pregnancy a “symptom of a youth with no prospects” (Rich-Edwards 555). These observations implicitly criticize how teenage pregnancy prevention, as well as the academic study of it, has been largely framed in economic and individualized terms.

In fact, putting teenage pregnancy's consequences in strictly economic terms has been identified as a distinctively American perspective, as “there must be something wrong with young girls who become pregnant [...], for we are a nation with a deep belief in the ability of an individual to rise above a deprived environment” (Bonell 264). As a result, teen pregnancy is configured as a problem because often teenage girls turn out to be unable to support themselves without relying on government aid, which is a perspective that stresses the importance of self-reliance and figures entitlement to government support as a 'waste' as opposed to a 'right', and is firmly couched within the current neo-liberal political climate in American culture which is emphasizing individual responsibility and self-help (Bonell 269). Therefore, even though perspectives on teenage pregnancy may differ, it could be argued that there is broad consensus that teenage pregnancy as 'a problem' exists, however, the proposed solutions to this 'problem' vary greatly.

Despite the emergent criticism, the most prominent solution to curbing teenage pregnancy remains that of introducing comprehensive sexual education in schools. The “Adolescent Family Life Act” passed in the 1980s, also known as the 'chastity law', was crucial to the shape and form of sex education as it is taught in the US today, with abstinence as a

central focus in order to avoid teens having sex before marriage (Furstenberg 87). Additionally to the formulation of the legislation alone maintaining the dominant discourse of heteronormativity, it draws attention to the most important 'gatekeepers' of sexual information, namely, the schools, families and to a lesser extent health clinics (Furstenberg 101). Complicating debates of making sexual health information accessible to teenagers, families themselves tend to not provide information about sexual health, and yet do not want the school to fulfill this function either (ibid.).

As chronicled by Furstenberg (88), as well as D'Emilio and Freedman (360), teenage sexuality is deeply embedded within US politics. This directly influences what is taught in schools, as opposed to be based on scientific, evidence based knowledge, while social acceptability of how to implement or the fear of how this knowledge could be used by teenagers is the leading direction of the dominant, government discourse (Furstenberg 88). Specifically political conservatism during the Reagan administration restricted abortion services and gave back parents their authority over their children, a path that sexual education has taken across the United States thus far (D'Emilio and Freedman 345). At the focus of this sexual education stands abstinence before anything else, which is of notable relevance, as political as well as religious conservatives have been able to "shape the debate and define the terms" (Furstenberg 95) which undoubtedly makes them a major source of knowledge for the dominant discourse, whether one is rejecting abstinence-only education or not.

Further, the need to 'fight' the epidemic of teenage pregnancy can be linked to the declining cultural value of marriage (Furstenberg 23). This added another dimension to teenage pregnancy as a distinctively American 'social problem': while all industrialized nations saw a decline in marriage (Furstenberg 122), the US took remarkable political measures that should entice American citizens to marry: as much as \$230 million have been spent under the Bush administration to help promote marriage throughout the country (Furstenberg 130).

Therefore, in fighting teenage pregnancy through discouraging teens from engaging in sex, the dominant Western discourse of heteronormativity, which includes marriage and child bearing in the appropriate order, is sought to be maintained (Furstenberg 74). Taking this into consideration, I would argue that not the supposed health risks or devastating effects on economic well being (Rich-Edwards 555) are the primary reason to limit and curtail teenage sexuality; rather, it is meant as a clear encouragement to follow what Todd has called the

“normative biosocial life course” (36). This further supports the study conducted by the University of Maryland, and is also echoed by Furstenberg's argument that teenage pregnancy should not be seen as the cause or catalyst of the generational cycle of poverty, rather, it should be seen as a symptom this poverty and lack of economic opportunities (74). The sociocultural, political as well as academic response to teenage pregnancy – social stigma, shaming, liberally backed government aid as well as conservatively encouraged cut of welfare expenditures – can be argued to be a bigger factor in socioeconomic disadvantage for single teenage mothers and poor families rather than an early pregnancy (ibid.). This, then, exposes the 'feminization of poverty' (Tally 208), as even academic research has initially privileged, as well as helped create the 'problem' of teenage pregnancy, together with the heteronormative structures for their perceived economic security, whether those hold true or not (ibid): “Poverty *causes* teen pregnancy. Simply put, girls with prospects do not have babies” (Richards 555).

Teenage pregnancy's potential for moral panic is elevated within the American understanding of heteronormative sexuality, as sex appears to just 'happen' and “is widely regarded in American culture as 'uncontrollable' and 'spontaneous' and ipso facto fraught with 'risk'. In short, though American teens seem to be getting better at using contraception, they are doing so in the face of steady and institutional resistance” (Furstenberg 101). This leads Furstenberg to note that, even though legislation, education and political debates seem restrictive of teenage sexuality on a whole due to its many 'risks', this all seems to have little effect on teen sexual practices (Furstenberg 95). If at all, teenagers seem to be using contraceptives more readily than completely abstaining from sex, as surveys from the CDC reported (Furstenberg 96). In connection to this, Furstenberg argues that the 'riskiness' of sexuality is not necessarily more risky than other risky behaviors that have been normalized and are acceptable for teens to engage in, such as driving a car (Furstenberg 104). Driving is in itself dangerous, yet, gradually introducing and training one to avoid those dangers is perceived as the best strategy (ibid.), thus, normalizing the risk of driving. This would be a strategy educators could employ for sexuality as well, Furstenberg notes, as this way, teens could be empowered to make decisions that ensure their physical as well as emotional health (ibid.).

However, this would be in direct opposition to *16 and Pregnant* when it uses teenage sexuality and pregnancy as a vehicle to instill anxieties back into normative heterosexuality in order to curb teenage pregnancy, which could be seen as the resurgence of a traditional,

dominant discourse when considering

As the dominant middle class culture has come to attach more value to sexual fulfillment and pleasure, preserving marriage as a privileged site for sexual expression has proven more difficult. Then, too, the easy availability of effective methods of birth control has removed much of the danger that once attached to nonmarital heterosexuality. (D'Emilio and Freedman 359)

Together with the “affirmation of sexual pleasure”, the weakened link between sex and procreation, and therefore a disruption on the “primacy of heterosexuality itself” (D'Emilio and Freedman 274), then, turns the anxiety-inducing representations of teenage sexuality in *16 and Pregnant* into a 'vehicle for social control'. The anxiety of these representations matter because “cultural constructions of sexuality provide the backdrop for the adolescent sexual experience” (Brooks-Gunn and Furstenberg 60). This implies that representations of teenage sexuality drenched in anxiety intensify the taboo of acknowledging teenage sexuality, ironically, right from the beginning of puberty, where the constant calls for self-enforcing abstinence cruelly acknowledge this desire, while at the same time work to stifle it (Brooks-Gunn and Furstenberg 62). This phenomenon has been described as “pubertal amnesia”, a cultural condition that lets adults seemingly forget their own teenage experience and teenage sexuality (ibid.).

As a result, *16 and Pregnant* – which 60% of American teenagers have watched (Lance, A. et al.) – turns teenage pregnancy itself into a 'problem' that could potentially affect everyone, not just the disadvantaged, as well as marking a shift in discourse on teenage sexuality towards individualization and anxiety. Arguably, *because* media texts like *16 and Pregnant* have helped create an increasing interest in fighting teenage pregnancy, a dynamic additionally driven by the fear that it could reach beyond those without prospects (Richards 555). With the terminality of AIDS becoming less and less urgent as medical treatment continues to improve, the possibility that teenage sexuality and pregnancy could be the *cause* for intergenerational poverty is a new fear that can carve out new, normative ways of social control through sexuality. The *idea* that teenage pregnancy might be associated with poverty is not new by any means; the operationalization of this fear to control teenage sexuality through teenagers themselves through bottom-up governmentality, however, is. Even when arguing for providing access to sexual knowledge through education, these discussions still cast teenage sexuality, and the managing of it, in strictly pedagogical discourse, as well as biological reproduction within

heteronormativity (Weeks 7), as well as in individualized terms of self-governing 'risky behavior' (Jamieson and Romer) which denies teenagers the newer, and currently dominant discourse of sexuality which emphasizes aspects of desire, individual pleasure, the erotic and identity formation through sexuality (D'Emilio and Freedman xi).

4. Conclusion

As I have hoped to have shown, *16 and Pregnant's* representations of teenage sexuality, through their textualities and relational dynamics, are deeply private and individualized, as well as permeated with fear, anxiety which frame teenage sexuality in terms of *adult* sexuality's heteronormative consequences caused by teenager's transgression into too-early sexuality. The logical, realist conclusion, in this RTV text striving for an almost autobiographical impression of the 'harsh truth' of teenage sexuality, is that those teenage girls who failed to self-manage and limit their sexuality must now struggle with the consequences their entire lives. Because engaging with this text is only possible through the pregnant teenage girl's POV, the teenaged audience is encouraged to identify and accept their struggles as their own which extends the fear of making the same mistake into a warning message of '*it-can-happen-to-you*' to the teenage audience. In addition, the reassertion of parental control through infantilization shows that the discursive struggles are not simply about *restricting* or delimiting teenage sexuality, but at the same time maintaining what it means to be an adult. Consequently, the naturalization of age normalizes the lack of sexual agency of teenagers (Guglielmo and Stewart 29).

The analysis of this TV show and its representations of teenage sexuality was relevant because of its extremely high visibility (Lance et al. 292), thus reaching teenagers all across the United States, rather than dismissing it as a trivial part of the rising, easily replicable RTV genre. This would ignore the importance and intersections of how meanings of age and sexuality are being created, reiterated, challenged as well as circulated through media and TV texts. Instead, my thesis explored the ways in which TV textualities and discourses teenage sexuality are represented in order to subsequently attempt and evaluate its place within the larger discourse on teenage sexuality, rather than simply starting with the assumption that *16 and Pregnant* has the effect on teenage pregnancy that its creator claimed it has.

This analysis further highlighted *16 and Pregnant's* deeply individualizing representation of teenage pregnancy and sexuality, which has been criticized for dislocating this

issue from its political and socioeconomic surroundings, such as poverty. These representations not just naturalize, but also depoliticize and disempower those who find themselves in disadvantaged socioeconomic circumstances by framing not just the problem, but also the solution within individualized terms. Further, I argued that an investigation of the representations of teenage sexuality would yield greater insight in teenage sexuality's possible meanings. Therefore, instead of being repressed by religious or social conservative discourses, the centrality of sexual identity is much more productive than those discourses that are prohibitive, yet prominently visible when considering traditionally dominant discursive formations. This, in turn, gives rise to the critique of comprehensive sexual education as the supposed liberation of teenage sexuality from abstinence's restrictive, prohibitive discourse. The fact that widespread, authoritative sources – such as *The National Campaign* and its *StayTeen.org* website, as well as the CDC – firstly recommend abstinence in sexual health information when addressing teens, but not when addressing adults, further exposes the deeply interdependent discourses of age and sexuality. As I have argued in this thesis, even in those instances when *adult* sexual knowledge is advocated to be made accessible with the expectation of teenagers to *act* on that knowledge, there are new categories of appropriateness: romantic relationships, monogamy, and limited partners can be seen as liberating, but also as delimiting categories of teenage sexuality.

In having analyzed *16 and Pregnant*'s representations of teenage sexuality, I hope to encourage further research, as there are additional, highly relevant and controversial TV shows that have yet to attract academic attention, such as *Toddlers and Tiaras* (TLC), *The Secret Life of the American Teenager* (ABC Family) and *The Hard Times of RJ Berger* (MTV), as they all feature distinct representations of teenage sexuality worthy of analytical exploration.

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6. Appendix

6.1. Curriculum Vitae

Persönliche Daten

Name:	Stefanie Varga
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Studium an der Universität Wien

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6.2. Abstracts

Abstract in English

Academic discussions of teenage sexuality on TV routinely employ content analyses and quantitative methods, presuming that the increasingly high frequency of any sort of depiction of sexuality would have an 'effect' on young audiences. The ways in which TV actually represents teenage sexuality, however, has been largely overlooked despite its high visibility across various TV genres. Therefore, this thesis is going to explore *how* teenage sexuality is represented in a Reality TV format targeted at teens, namely MTV's *16 and Pregnant* (2009). Created with the intention to empower pregnant teenage girls by giving them a voice, I will analyze the show as a TV text striving towards creating an impression of realism, rather than conceiving of it as an innocent reflection of reality or as a media product to be consumed. Firstly, the analysis will focus on *16 and Pregnant's* most important textualities, such as its contrastive, emotionally juxtapositioned editing, teenage narration and point-of-view, which all work toward making it an autobiographical narrative that frames teenage pregnancy and its struggles as deeply personal and private, which is all surrounded by Reality TV's genre convention of representing 'emotion as truth'. Secondly, in order to more fully grasp *16 and Pregnant's* representations, I will analyze the discourse created within its relational dynamics of parents and their teenage daughters, as well as teenage narrators and their teenage audience. The overwhelming majority of interactions between parents and their teenage daughters are taking place between *mothers* and their pregnant teenage daughters, which further genders the discourse on teenage sexuality and pregnancy. Additionally, the high frequency of conflicts and arguments frame teenage sexuality in terms of crumbling parental control, which is being reasserted through routine infantilization. This is demarcating sexuality and its heteronormative consequences – pregnancy, raising a child – as strictly adult and seemingly impossible for teenage parents to handle responsibly, not due to it being a difficult task, but *because* they are 'too-young' and thus lack sexual agency. As I will argue, this naturalization of age does not just intersect, but is interdependent with discourse on sexuality. As a result, *16 and Pregnant's* representations of teenage sexuality are strictly delimited within heteronormativity, seemingly omitting current, dominant understandings of sexuality as desire and place of identity formation, in favor of highlighting sexuality as primarily heterosexual, monogamous and

reproductive. This then casts teenage pregnancy to stand metonymically for teenage sexuality as a whole, as *16 and Pregnant*'s representations are permeated with anxiety and fear about the teenage girls' struggle with sexuality's heteronormative consequences. This is echoed on the relational dynamic of the teenage narrators and their teenage audience, where parental control is now replaced with seemingly authentic, teenage voices. Instead of resulting in empowerment, however, I will show how also this relational dynamic reinforces the multiaxiality of sexuality and age, only this time through individualization, as well as the pervasive notion of self-management of sexuality through governmentality. *16 and Pregnant*'s textualities, as well as discourse, come together to encourage the audience to assume the pregnant teenage girl's point-of-view and accept her struggle as an unproblematic consequence caused by the choice of transgressing into the discursively adult space of sexuality. Lastly, this thesis will embed *16 and Pregnant*'s representations within the larger discourse of teenage pregnancy as an 'epidemic', as well as a social and public health problem, where I will be critical of its proposed prevention through teaching comprehensive sexual education at school, and question whether this would indeed be empowering or 'liberating' teenage sexuality.

Abstract in German

Die akademische Behandlung von Jugendsexualität im Zusammenhang mit TV bezieht sich gewöhnlich auf Inhaltsanalysen und quantifizierbare Methoden, ausgehend von der Annahme, dass das messbare Vorkommen von Sexualität im TV eine Auswirkung auf ein junges Publikum haben wird. Auf welche Art und Weise TV- Serien Repräsentationen von Jugendsexualität konstruieren, ist bis jetzt eine oft unbemerkte Fragestellung, trotz ihrer zunehmenden Sichtbarkeit über verschiedenste TV Genres hinweg. Darum wird diese Arbeit der Fragestellung nachgehen, auf welche Weise Jugendsexualität innerhalb des Genres Reality-TV repräsentiert wird, am Beispiel von Serie *16 and Pregnant* (2009) von MTV. *16 and Pregnant* wurde angeblich mit der Intention produziert, schwangeren Jugendlichen eine Stimme in der 'teenage pregnancy' Debatte zu verleihen. In meiner Analyse werde ich die Sendung als TV- Text behandeln, besonders im Hinblick auf seine strukturellen Versatzstücke, welche einen Eindruck von Realismus erzeugen sollen(, anstatt einer unvoreingenommenen Reflexion oder ein manipulierendes Konsumprodukt). Folglich werde ich die formgebenden Textualitäten von

16 and Pregnant analysieren, wobei ich besonderen Fokus auf den kontrastreichen, emotionsstrukturierenden Schnitt, die weiblichen, jugendlichen Erzählerstimmen und deren Perspektive innerhalb der Kameraeinstellungen und Inhalt der Serie richte, wobei all diese Strukturen auf die autobiographische Rahmengoebung hinarbeiten. Dies repräsentiert 'teenage pregnancy' als persönlich und privat, was zusätzlich zu der für das Reality TV genretypischen 'Emotion als Wahrheit' verstärkt individualisierend wirkt. Um *16 and Pregnant's* Repräsentationen von Jugendsexualität nicht auf dessen Textualitäten zu reduzieren, wird die Analyse auch diesen Diskurs behandeln. Da Diskurs keine zentrale oder fixe Beständigkeit hat, muss er immer wieder neu ausgehandelt und verteidigt werden, und wird daher auf der Ebene von Beziehungsdynamiken in bestimmten, sozialen Kontexten erfasst. Die erste Beziehungsdynamik umfasst die Eltern und deren schwangere Töchter, die zweite die schwangeren Jugendlichen und deren junges Zielpublikum. Die überwältigende Mehrheit der Interaktionen auf der ersten Ebene der Beziehungsdynamik findet zwischen den Müttern und dessen schwangeren Töchtern statt, was zusätzlich 'teenage pregnancy' als exklusiv weibliche Aufgabe und Belastung darstellt. Hinzu kommt, dass die Art der Interaktionen hauptsächlich Konflikte beinhaltet, welche Jugendsexualität im Sinne von instabiler, elterlicher Kontrolle, die durch Infantilisierung der jugendlichen Mutter versucht wird, wieder gewonnen zu werden. Diese konfliktreichen Aushandlungen grenzen Sexualität und deren heteronormative Konsequenzen – Schwangerschaft und Kindeserziehung – als eine *erwachsene* und für Jugendliche unerfüllbare Verantwortung ab. Diese Abgrenzung basiert aber nicht etwa darauf, wie immens schwierig Kindeserziehung ist, sondern auf dem Alter der jugendlichen Mütter, welches in einer wechselwirkenden Beziehung zu Sexualität steht. Folglich sind die Repräsentationen von *16 and Pregnant* von Jugendsexualität als strikt innerhalb der Grenzen von Heteronormativität anzusiedeln, welche eine Inklusion von modernen Diskursen von Sexualität als sexuelles und erotisches Begehren, sowie als Ort der Identitätsbildung kategorisch ausschließen. Somit wird Jugendsexualität als primär heterosexuell, monogam und reproduktiv repräsentiert, was zur Folge hat, dass 'teenage pregnancy' ein metonymischer Platzhalter für Jugendsexualität als Ganzes konstruiert wird. Zusätzlich sind diese Repräsentationen von 'teenage pregnancy' ständig von Besorgnis und Angst begleitet, besonders in der Fokussierung auf das Ringen der jungen Mütter angesichts der elterlichen Pflichten, welche als für sie unbewältigbar dargestellt werden. Diese Repräsentation ziehen sich in die

zweite Ebene der Beziehungsdynamik durch, wobei die Instabilität der elterlichen Kontrolle über Jugendsexualität mit einer allem Anschein nach authentischen, bestärkten Stimme des jugendlichen Erzählers ersetzt wird. Dass diese Machtverschiebung noch lange nicht eine Emanzipation der schwangeren Jugendlichen zur Folge haben muss, klärt der letzte Abschnitt. Darin werde ich zeigen, dass durch die jugendlichen Erzählerinnen die ineinander verwobenen Diskurse von Sexualität und Alter als naturalisiert akzeptiert werden, was durch individualisierende Konzepte wie Governmentalität gezeigt wird. Folglich arbeiten *16 and Pregnant's* Textualitäten sowie Diskurse an einer Repräsentation von Jugendsexualität, die nur durch die Perspektive der schwangeren Jugendlichen begriffen werden kann. Gleichzeitig bestimmt dies die einzige Identifikationsmöglichkeit, welche dem jugendlichen Zielpublikum angeboten wird, was somit die repräsentierten Ängste und Besorgnisse auf das Publikum überträgt. Zusammen mit *16 and Pregnant's* generischem Realismus produziert dies Jugendsexualität als von verantwortungslosen Jugendlichen begangener Fehler, dessen Konsequenzen im Zuge der diskursiven Transgression in eine *erwachsene* Sexualität ertragen werden müssen. Schließlich wird meine Arbeit Repräsentation mit dem dominanten Diskurs der 'teenage pregnancy' als eine Epidemie sowie als soziales oder bevölkerungsgesundheitliches Problem verstehen will kontextualisiert. Im Zuge dessen wird der Lösungsvorschlag der 'teenage pregnancy' Epidemie durch verbesserten Sexualunterricht kritisiert, in Hinsicht auf sein Verständnis als 'Lieberalisierung' und Befreiung der Jugendsexualität gegenüber der verstärkten Betonung auf Abstinenz von Jugendlichen.

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